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THE PLAYS OF
ST. JOHN HANKIN

ST. JOHN HANKIN

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THE PLAYS OF ST. JOHN HANKIN

WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY JOHN DRINKWATER

VOLUME
TWO

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THE CASSILIS ENGAGEMENT

A COMEDY FOR MOTHERS

(1905)

CHARACTERS

Mrs. Cassilis.
Geoffrey Cassilis, *her son.*
Lady Marchmont, *her sister.*
The Countess of Remenham.
Major Warrington, *her brother.*
Lady Mabel Venning, *her daughter.*
Mrs. Borridge.
Ethel Borridge, *her daughter.*
The Rev. Hildebrand Herries, *the Rector.*
Mrs. Herries, *his wife.*
Watson, *butler at Deynham.*
Dorset, *Mrs. Cassilis's maid.*
Two Footmen.

The action of the play passes at Deynham Abbey, Mrs. Cassilis's house in Leicestershire, Act I in the Drawing-room, Act II on the Lawn, Act III in the Smoking-room, and Act IV in the Morning-room. One night passes between Acts I and II and between Acts III and IV, one week between Acts II and III.

Note.—The Leicestershire Cassilises pronounce their name as it is spelt.

THE CASSILIS ENGAGEMENT

ACT I

SCENE.—*The white drawing-room at Deynham Abbey, a very handsome room furnished in the Louis Seize style. There are big double doors at the back, and a large tea-table, with teacups, etc., on cloth, stands rather to the left of them. There is a large French window open on the left of the stage, with a sofa in front of it facing the view. On the opposite side of the room is the fireplace, but there is no fire as the month is August. Two or three arm-chairs stand near it. When the curtain rises the* RECTOR *is standing judicially on the hearthrug. He seems about to hum a tune, but thinks better of it.* MRS. HERRIES *is standing by the window. Presently she crosses to her husband, and sits in one of the arm-chairs. The* RECTOR *is a rubicund, humorous-looking man of fifty; his wife a prosperous-looking lady a few years younger.*

MRS. HERRIES. I wonder what can be keeping Mrs. Cassilis?

RECTOR [*back to fire*]. My dear, I told you we oughtn't to have called. On so sad an occasion——

MRS. HERRIES. My dear Hildebrand, it's just on these sad occasions that a visit is so consoling. One should always call after a birth, a funeral——

BUTLER [*showing in* LADY REMENHAM *and her daughter*]. I will tell Mrs. Cassilis you are here, my lady. She will be down in a moment.

LADY REMENHAM. Thank you. How do you do, Mrs. Herries? How do you do, Rector?

[LADY REMENHAM *goes towards fireplace and shakes hands. She is a dignified old lady of about sixty. Her normal expression is one of placid self-assurance, but to-day she has the air of disapproving of something or somebody.* MABEL *is a very pretty girl of two and twenty.* LADY REMENHAM *seats herself comfortably by* MRS. HERRIES. MABEL *goes over to window, where the* RECTOR *joins her.*]

MRS. HERRIES. How do you do, Lady Remenham?

RECTOR. How do you do, Mabel?

LADY REMENHAM. You've heard this dreadful news, haven't you? [RECTOR *makes sympathetic gesture.*

MRS. HERRIES. Yes. Poor Mrs. Cassilis.

LADY REMENHAM. Poor Adelaide, indeed! That unhappy boy! But there! How any mother can allow such a thing to happen passes my comprehension. To get engaged!

RECTOR [*nods sympathetically*]. Just so.

LADY REMENHAM. Engagements are such troublesome things. They sometimes even lead to marriage. But we'll hope it won't be as bad as that in this case. You've not heard who she is, I suppose?

MRS. HERRIES [*shaking her head mournfully*]. No.

LADY REMENHAM. Ah! Some one quite impossible, of course. Otherwise Adelaide would have told me in her letter.

MRS. HERRIES. I'm afraid so.

LADY REMENHAM [*irritably*]. It's really extremely wicked of Geoffrey. And so silly, too!—which is worse. A temporary infatuation I could understand, terminated by some small monetary payment. It would have been regrettable, of course, but young men are like that. And Adelaide could have stopped it out of his allowance. But an engagement! I am quite shocked at her.

MABEL [*at window, turning to her mother*]. Don't you think, mamma, we might leave Mrs. Cassilis to manage her son's affairs her own way.

LADY REMENHAM. She has *not* managed them. That's exactly what I complain of. I can't altogether acquit the Rector of some blame in the matter. He was Geoffrey's tutor for years. They used to say in *my* young days, "Train up a child in the way he should go——"

RECTOR [*attempting a mild jest*]. And when he's grown up he'll give you a great deal of anxiety. So they did! So they did!

LADY REMENHAM [*severely*]. That is not the ending *I* remember.

RECTOR. That is the Revised Version.

[MRS. HERRIES *frowns. She feels this is not a moment for levity.*]

LADY REMENHAM. I dare say. They seem to alter everything nowadays. But, if so, I hardly see the use of education.

RECTOR [*obstinately cheerful*]. I have long been of that opinion, Lady Remenham.

[MRS. CASSILIS, *in a charming flutter of apologies, enters at this moment. She is a very pretty woman of forty, tall and graceful, and exquisitely dressed.*]

MRS. CASSILIS. You *must* forgive me, all of you. I had some letters to finish. [*General handshake. Kiss to* MABEL.] Dear Mabel. How do you do, Mrs. Herries?

RECTOR. How do you do, Mrs. Cassilis?

LADY REMENHAM. My dear Adelaide, *what* a charming gown! But you always do have the most delightful clothes. Where *do* you get them?

MRS. CASSILIS. Clarice made this.

[*Two footmen bring the tea-table down into the middle*

of the room. The BUTLER, *who has brought in a teapot on a salver, places it on the table, and brings up a chair for* MRS. CASSILIS. *The footmen go out.*]

LADY REMENHAM. Clarice? The wretch! She always makes my things atrociously. If only I had your figure!

MRS. CASSILIS. Excuse me, dear. [*To* BUTLER.] The carriage has gone to the station to meet Lady Marchmont, Watson?

BUTLER. Yes, madam. It started five minutes ago.

[*Exit* BUTLER.

MRS. CASSILIS [*to* LADY REMENHAM]. I'm so glad you like it. [*Goes to tea-table and seats herself.*

LADY REMENHAM. Is Margaret coming to stay with you?

MRS. CASSILIS. Yes, for ten days.

LADY REMENHAM [*drawing chair up to table*]. And now will you please pour out my tea? I have come here to scold you, and I shall require several cups.

MRS. CASSILIS [*quite cheerful*]. To scold *me?* Won't you all bring your chairs to the table? [*They all do so.*] Rector, where are you? [*To* LADY REMENHAM.] Cream?

LADY REMENHAM. Thank you. And a small lump.

MRS. CASSILIS. And why am I to be scolded?

LADY REMENHAM. You know quite well. [*Sternly.*] Adelaide, what is this I hear about Geoffrey's engagement?

MRS. CASSILIS [*not at all disturbed*]. Oh, that? Yes, Geoffrey has got engaged to a girl in London. Isn't it *romantic* of him! I know nothing whatever about her except that I believe she has no money, and Geoffrey is over head and ears in love with her.

MRS. HERRIES [*blandly*]. My dear Mrs. Cassilis, I should have thought *that* was quite enough!

MRS. CASSILIS. Rector, will you cut that cake? It's just by your hand.

LADY REMENHAM [*refusing to be diverted from the task of cross-examination*]. Where did he meet her?

MRS. CASSILIS. In an omnibus, I understand.

LADY REMENHAM [*scandalised*]. An omnibus!

MRS. CASSILIS. Yes. That was so *romantic*, too! One of the horses fell down, and she was frightened. They thought she was going to faint. Geoffrey got her out, took charge of her, discovered her address, and took her home. Wasn't it *clever* of him? Of course she asked him to come in. He was introduced to her mother. And now they're engaged. [*Gives cup to* RECTOR.

LADY REMENHAM [*with awful dignity*]. And what is the name of this young person?

MRS. CASSILIS. Borridge.

LADY REMENHAM. Borridge! Mabel, my love, pray remember if ever you come home and inform me that you are engaged to a person of the name of Borridge I shall whip you. [*Puts down cup.*

MABEL. Very well, mamma.

MRS. CASSILIS. Another cup?

LADY REMENHAM. Thank you. Rather less sugar this time. [*Gives cup.*] I never could understand why you let Geoffrey be in London at all. Alone too. Young men ought never to be allowed out alone at his age. They are so susceptible.

MABEL. Geoffrey has his profession, mamma.

MRS. CASSILIS. Geoffrey's at the Bar, you know.

LADY REMENHAM. The Bar! What business has Geoffrey to be at the Bar! Deynham has the best shooting in the Shires, and in the winter there's the hunting. What more does he want? It's disgraceful.

RECTOR [*another mild effort at humour*]. My dear Lady Remenham, you're sure you're not confusing the *Bar* with the *Dock?*

MRS. HERRIES. Hildebrand!

LADY REMENHAM [*impatiently*]. The Bar is a good

enough profession, of course. But only for *very* younger sons. Geoffrey will have Deynham some day, and twelve thousand a year. I don't think Adelaide need have made a little attorney of him.

MRS. CASSILIS. Young men must do *something*, don't you think?

LADY REMENHAM [*briskly*]. Certainly not! It's this vulgar Radical notion that people ought to *do* things that is ruining English Society. What did Mr. Borridge *do*, by the way?

MRS. CASSILIS [*hesitates*]. He was a bookmaker, I believe.

LADY REMENHAM [*triumphantly*]. There, you see! That's what comes of *doing* things!

MRS. CASSILIS [*slight shrug. Pouring herself out more tea, and still quite unruffled*]. Well, I'm afraid there's no use in discussing it. They're engaged, and Miss Borridge is coming down here.

MRS. HERRIES. Coming here!

LADY REMENHAM. Coming here!!!

MRS. CASSILIS. Yes. On a visit. With her mother.

LADY REMENHAM [*putting down her cup with a touch of solemnity*]. Adelaide, are you—excuse my asking the question—are you *quite* in your right mind?

MRS. CASSILIS [*laughing*]. I believe so.

LADY REMENHAM. You've noticed nothing? No dizziness about the head? No singing in the ears? [MRS. CASSILIS *shakes her head.*] And yet you ask this young woman to stay with you! *And* her mother! Neither of whom you know anything whatever about!

MRS. CASSILIS. Another cup?

[LADY REMENHAM *shakes her head irritably.*

LADY REMENHAM. Is *Mr.* Borridge—Ugh!—coming too?

MRS. CASSILIS. He is dead, I believe.

LADY REMENHAM. That, at least, is satisfactory.

MABEL. Mamma !

LADY REMENHAM. Mabel, I shall do my duty whatever happens. [*Turning to* MRS. CASSILIS *again.*] And does Mrs. Borridge carry on the business ? I think you said he was a *boot*-maker ?

MABEL. *Book*-maker.

MRS. CASSILIS [*refusing to take offence*]. No. I believe he left her some small annuity.

LADY REMENHAM. Annuity ? Ah, dies with her, of course ?

MRS. CASSILIS. No doubt.

LADY REMENHAM [*gasps*]. Well, Adelaide, I never should have believed it of you. To ask these people to the house !

MRS. CASSILIS. Why shouldn't I ask them ? Geoffrey tells me Ethel is charming.

LADY REMENHAM. Ethel ?

MRS. CASSILIS. Miss Borridge.

LADY REMENHAM. Bah !

Enter BUTLER, *showing in another visitor. This is* LADY MARCHMONT, MRS. CASSILIS'S *sister. She is a woman of about five and forty. She wears a light travelling cloak. She is not unlike* MRS. CASSILIS *in appearance and manner, but is of a more delicate, fragile type.*

BUTLER. Lady Marchmont.

MRS. CASSILIS [*rising*]. Ah, Margaret. How glad I am to see you. Some more tea, Watson.

LADY MARCHMONT [*kisses her*]. Not for me, please. No, really. My doctor won't *hear* of it. Hot water with a little milk is the most he allows me. How do you do, dear ? [*Shaking hands with the others.*] How do you do ? How do you do ?

[BUTLER *goes out.*]

MRS. CASSILIS. How's the General ?

LADY MARCHMONT. Very gouty. His temper this morning was atrocious, poor man.

LADY REMENHAM [*shakes her head*]. You bear it like a saint, dear.

LADY MARCHMONT [*philosophically, sitting in arm-chair after laying aside her cloak*]. Yes—I go away a good deal. He finds my absence very soothing. That's why I was so glad to accept Adelaide's invitation when she asked me.

MRS. CASSILIS. My dear, you'll be invaluable. I look to you to help me with my visitors.

LADY REMENHAM. Poor Margaret. But you always were so unselfish.

LADY MARCHMONT. Are they *very*——?

LADY REMENHAM. *Very.*

MRS. CASSILIS [*laughing*]. My dear, Lady Remenham knows nothing whatever about them.

LADY REMENHAM [*firmly*]. I know everything about them. The girl has no money. She has no position. She became engaged to Geoffrey without your knowledge. She has a perfectly dreadful mother. And her name is Borridge.

LADY MARCHMONT [*raising her brows*]. When are they coming?

MRS. CASSILIS. I expect them in half an hour. The carriage was to go straight back to the station to meet them.

LADY REMENHAM [*ruffling her feathers angrily*]. I hope Geoffrey is conscious of the folly and wickedness of his conduct.

LADY MARCHMONT. Where is he, dear?

MRS. CASSILIS. He's down here with me—and as happy as possible, I'm glad to say.

LADY REMENHAM. Extraordinary! But the young men of the present day *are* extraordinary. Young men nowadays seem always to be either irreclaimably vicious or deplorably silly. I prefer them vicious. They give less trouble. My poor brother Algernon—you remember

Algernon, don't you, Rector? He was another of your pupils.

RECTOR [*sighs*]. Yes, I remember.

MRS. HERRIES. Major Warrington hasn't been down for quite a long time, has he?

LADY REMENHAM. No. We don't ask him to Milverton now. He comes to us in London, but in the country one has to be more particular. He really is dreadfully dissipated. Always running after some petticoat or other. Often more than one. But there is safety in numbers, don't you think?

RECTOR. Unquestionably.

LADY REMENHAM. Algernon always says he is by temperament a polygamist. I don't know what he means. However, I've no anxiety about *him*. *He never* gets engaged. He's far too *clever* for that. I wonder if he could help you out of this dreadful entanglement? In a case of this kind one should have the very best advice.

MRS. CASSILIS [*laughing*]. I shall be delighted to see Major Warrington—though not for the reason you suggest.

LADY REMENHAM. Well, I'll ask him down. Remenham won't like it. He disapproves of him so much. He gets quite virtuous about it. But that sort of moral indignation should never be allowed to get out of hand, should it? [RECTOR *nods*.] Besides, he's away just now. I'll write to Algernon directly I get back, and I'll bring him over to dinner one day next week. Say Thursday?

LADY MARCHMONT. Do, dear. I adore Major Warrington.

LADY REMENHAM. I dare say. [*Preparing to go*.] He's not *your* brother. Meantime, I can ask him whether he knows anything against Mrs. Borridge. But he's sure to. He knows nearly all the detrimental people in London, especially if their daughters are in the least attractive.

MRS. CASSILIS [*smiling*]. You'll come *with* him on Thursday, won't you? And Mabel? [MABEL *rises*.

LADY REMENHAM. Perhaps that will be best. Then I can keep my brother within bounds. Poor Algernon is apt to take too much champagne unless I am there to prevent him. And now, dear, I really must go. [*She and* MABEL *go up towards door.*] Good-bye.

MRS. CASSILIS. You won't stay to meet Mrs. Borridge?

LADY REMENHAM [*shudders*]. I think not. Thursday will be *quite* soon enough. Good-bye, Mrs. Herries. [*As they reach door* GEOFFREY *opens it, and almost runs into her arms.*] Ah, *here* is the young man who is causing us all this distress.

GEOFFREY. I, Lady Remenham? [*Shakes hands.*] How do you do, Aunt Margaret?

[*Shakes hands with others.*

LADY REMENHAM [*shakes hands*]. You. What do you *mean* by getting engaged to some one we none of us know anything about?

MABEL. Mamma!

LADY REMENHAM. I consider your conduct perfectly heartless. Its foolishness needs no comment from me.

GEOFFREY. Really, Lady Remenham——

LADY REMENHAM. Tut, tut, sir. Don't "really" me. I'm ashamed of you. And now I'll be off before I quarrel with you. Come, Mabel.

[*Sweeps out, followed by* MABEL. GEOFFREY *opens door for them, and then takes them down to their carriage.*]

MRS. HERRIES. I think we ought to be going, too. Come, Hildebrand. [*Shakes hands.*

[MRS. CASSILIS *rings.*]

RECTOR. Good-bye, Mrs. Cassilis. Let's hope everything will turn out for the best.

MRS. HERRIES. It never does. Good-bye.

MRS. CASSILIS [*going towards door with* RECTOR]. Good-bye. [*Shakes hands warmly.*] And you'll both come and dine on Thursday, won't you? To-morrow

week that is. Major Warrington will want to see his old tutor.

RECTOR. You're very good.

[*He and* MRS. HERRIES *go out.*

MRS. CASSILIS [*returning to her sister*]. Dear Lady Remenham! What nonsense she talks.

LADY MARCHMONT. People who talk as much as that must talk a good deal of nonsense, mustn't they? Otherwise they have nothing to say.

Re-enter GEOFFREY.

GEOFFREY. Lady Remenham seems ruffled.

LADY MARCHMONT. About your engagement? I'm not surprised.

GEOFFREY. I don't see what it's got to do with her.

LADY MARCHMONT. You must make allowance for a mother's feelings, my dear Geoffrey.

GEOFFREY [*pats* MRS. CASSILIS'S *hand, then goes to tea-table and helps himself to tea*]. Lady Remenham isn't my mother. She's my god-mother.

LADY MARCHMONT. She's Mabel's mother.

MRS. CASSILIS. Sh! Margaret.

LADY MARCHMONT. My dear, there's no use making mysteries about things. Geoffrey was always supposed to be going to marry Mabel ever since they were children. He knows that.

GEOFFREY. That was only boy and girl talk.

LADY MARCHMONT. For you, perhaps.

GEOFFREY. And for her. Mabel never expected——

[*Pause. He thinks.*

LADY MARCHMONT. Did you ever ask her?

GEOFFREY. But I never supposed——

LADY MARCHMONT. I think you *should* have supposed. A boy should be very careful how he encourages a girl to think of him in that way.

GEOFFREY. But I'd no idea. Of course, I *like* Mabel.

I like her awfully. We're like brother and sister. But beyond that— [*Pause.*] Mother, do *you* think I've behaved badly to Mabel?

MRS. CASSILIS [*gently*]. I think perhaps you've a little disappointed her.

GEOFFREY [*peevishly*]. Why didn't somebody *tell* me? How was I to know?

LADY MARCHMONT. My dear boy, we couldn't be expected to know you were absolutely blind.

MRS. CASSILIS. Margaret, you're not to scold Geoffrey. I won't allow it.

GEOFFREY. Mother, dear—you won't allow this to make any difference? With Ethel, I mean?

MRS. CASSILIS. Of course not, Geoff.

[*Lays hand on his.*

GEOFFREY [*earnestly*]. She's so fond of me. And I'm so fond of her. We were made for each other. I couldn't bear it if you were unkind to her.

MRS. CASSILIS. My dear Geoff, I'm sure Ethel is everything that is sweet and good, or my boy wouldn't love her. And I intend to fall in love with her myself directly I set eyes on her.

GEOFFREY. Dear mother! [*Pats her hand affectionately. Pause; then, thoughtfully.*] I'm afraid you'll find *her* mother rather trying—at first. She's not quite a lady, you know. . . . But she's very good-natured.

MRS. CASSILIS [*cheerfully*]. Well, well, we shall see. And now run away, dear, and leave me to talk to Margaret, and I'll undertake that all symptoms of crossness shall have disappeared before our visitors arrive.

GEOFFREY. All right, mother.

[*Kisses her and goes out.*

LADY MARCHMONT [*looking after him reflectively*]. How you spoil that boy!

MRS. CASSILIS [*lightly*]. What else should I do with him? He's my only one. Mothers always spoil their

sons, don't they? And quarrel with their daughters. More marriages are due to girls being unhappy at home than most people imagine.

LADY MARCHMONT. And yet Geoffrey wants to leave you, apparently.

MRS. CASSILIS [*smiling bravely; but her eyes have a suspicion of moisture in them.*] Evidently I didn't spoil him enough.

LADY MARCHMONT [*washing her hands of the whole affair*]. Well, I'm glad you're pleased with this engagement.

MRS. CASSILIS [*sudden change of manner. Her face loses its brightness, and she suddenly seems to look older*]. *Pleased* with it! Do you really believe that?

LADY MARCHMONT. Didn't you say so?

MRS. CASSILIS [*shrugs*]. To Lady Remenham and Mrs. Herries. Yes.

LADY MARCHMONT. And to Geoffrey.

MRS. CASSILIS. And Geoffrey too. [*Half to herself.*] Mothers can't always be straightforward with their sons, can they?

LADY MARCHMONT. Why not?

[*There is a pause while* MRS. CASSILIS *makes up her mind whether to answer this or not. Then she seems to decide to speak out. She moves nearer to her sister, and when she begins her voice is very firm and matter-of-fact.*]

MRS. CASSILIS. My dear Margaret, what would *you* do if your son suddenly wrote to you that he had become engaged to a girl you knew nothing whatever about, a girl far beneath him in social rank?

LADY MARCHMONT [*firmly*]. I should have forbidden the engagement. Forbidden it absolutely.

MRS. CASSILIS. Without seeing the girl?

LADY MARCHMONT. Certainly. The mere fact of her accepting my son before I had ever set eyes on her would have been quite enough.

MRS. CASSILIS. But supposing your son were of age and independent?

LADY MARCHMONT [*impatiently*]. Geoffrey isn't independent.

MRS. CASSILIS. He has five hundred a year.

LADY MARCHMONT [*contemptuously*]. What's *that?*

MRS. CASSILIS. Besides, Geoffrey knows I should always be willing to help him.

LADY MARCHMONT. That's just it. He ought *not* to have known. You ought to have made it clear to him from the first that if he married without your consent he would never have a penny from you, either now or at your death. Deynham isn't entailed, fortunately.

MRS. CASSILIS. But, my dear, I couldn't *disinherit* Geoffrey! How could I?

LADY MARCHMONT [*shrugs*]. You could have threatened to. And then the girl wouldn't have accepted him.

MRS. CASSILIS. I don't know. [*Thoughtfully.*] Five hundred a year may seem a considerable sum to her.

LADY MARCHMONT [*horrified*]. Is it as bad as that?

MRS. CASSILIS [*trying to smile*]. Besides, she may be really in love with him.

LADY MARCHMONT [*snappish*]. What *has* that to do with it?

MRS. CASSILIS. Young people. In love. They are seldom prudent, are they?

LADY MARCHMONT. Still, I should have forbidden the engagement.

MRS. CASSILIS. And then?

LADY MARCHMONT. What do you mean?

MRS. CASSILIS. If Geoffrey had defied me? Boys can be very obstinate.

LADY MARCHMONT. I should have refused ever to see him again.

MRS. CASSILIS. Ah, Margaret, I couldn't do that. Geoffrey is everything I have. He is my only son, my joy

and my pride. I couldn't quarrel with him whatever happened. [LADY MARCHMONT *leans back with gesture of impatience.*] No, Margaret, my plan was the best.

LADY MARCHMONT. What *is* your plan?

MRS. CASSILIS [*quite practical*]. My plan is to give the thing a fair trial. Ask her down here. Ask her mother down here. And see what happens.

LADY MARCHMONT [*looking at her narrowly*]. Nothing else?

MRS. CASSILIS. Nothing else—at present.

LADY MARCHMONT. You could have done that without sanctioning the engagement.

MRS. CASSILIS. Yes. But love thrives on opposition. There's a fascination about a runaway match. It has romance. Whereas there's no romance at all about an ordinary wedding. It's only dull and rather vulgar. [*Wearily.*] And, after all, the girl *may* be presentable.

LADY MARCHMONT. Borridge! [*Crisply.*] I'm not very sanguine about *that.*

MRS. CASSILIS. Anyhow, she's pretty, and Geoffrey loves her. That's all we know about her at present.

LADY MARCHMONT. Wretched boy. To think he should have allowed himself to be caught in this way! . . . Don't you think you might have asked the daughter *without* the mother?

MRS. CASSILIS. So Geoffrey suggested. He seemed rather nervous about having her here. She's rather a terrible person, I gather. But I said as we were marrying into the family we mustn't be unkind to her. [*With a slow smile.*] Poor boy, he rather blenched at that. I think he hadn't associated *Mrs.* Borridge with his matrimonial schemes. It's just as well he should do so at once, don't you think?

BUTLER. Mrs. and Miss Borridge.

Enter MRS. BORRIDGE *and* ETHEL. *Both rise.* LADY

MARCHMONT *turns sharp round to look at the newcomers.* MRS. CASSILIS *goes up to meet them with her sweetest smile. Nothing could be more hospitable than her manner or more gracious than her welcome. The change from the* MRS. CASSILIS *of a moment before, with the resolute set of the lips and the glitter in the eyes, to this gentle, caressing creature does the greatest credit to her powers of self-control.* LADY MARCHMONT *notices it, and is a little shocked.*

MRS. CASSILIS. *How* do you do? *How* do you do, my dear? [*Kisses* ETHEL.] Tell Mr. Geoffrey, Watson. I hope you've not had a tiring journey, Mrs. Borridge?

Exit BUTLER.

MRS. BORRIDGE. Not at all, Mrs. Cassilis. We 'ad—had—the compartment to ourselves, bein' first class. As I says to my girlie, "They'll very likely send the carriage to meet us, and it looks better for the servants."

[MRS. BORRIDGE *comes down stage. She is a large, gross woman, rather over-dressed in inexpensive materials. Too much colour in her hat and far too much in her cheeks. But a beaming, good-natured harridan for all that. As a landlady you would rather like her. She smiles nervously in* LADY MARCHMONT'S *direction, not sure whether she ought to say anything or wait to be introduced. Her daughter keeps by her side, watching to see she doesn't commit herself, and quite sure that she will.* ETHEL *is pretty but second-rate; she has had the sense to dress simply, and therefore is less appallingly out of the picture than her far more amiable mother.*]

MRS. CASSILIS. Let me introduce you. Mrs. Borridge—Lady Marchmont, Miss Borridge.

[LADY MARCHMONT *bows.*]

MRS. BORRIDGE [*extends gloved hand*]. How do you do, Lady Marchmont? Proud, I'm sure.

[LADY MARCHMONT *finds nothing to say, and for the moment there is a constrained pause. Then enter* GEOFFREY *hurriedly.*]

GEOFFREY [*with as much heartiness as he can muster, but it rings a little hollow*]. How do you do, Mrs. Borridge? Ethel, dear, how long have you been here? I didn't hear you come. [*Kisses her.*

ETHEL. We've only just got here.

MRS. BORRIDGE [*subsiding into an arm-chair*]. Don't apologise, Geoffy. Your ma's been entertaining us most kind.

GEOFFREY [*with look of gratitude to* MRS. CASSILIS]. Dear mother.

MRS. BORRIDGE. Well, how *are* you, Geoffy? You *look* first-rate.

GEOFFREY. Oh, I'm all right.

MRS. BORRIDGE. And what a fine 'ouse—house—you've got! Quite a palace, I declare!

GEOFFREY. I'm glad you like it.

MRS. BORRIDGE. And it'll all be yours some day. Won't it?

ETHEL [*pulls her sleeve*]. Mother!

GEOFFREY. That's as my mother decides.

MRS. BORRIDGE. Then you're sure to 'ave it. I know what mothers are! And what a 'andsome room, too. Quite like the Metropole at Brighton.

Enter MRS. CASSILIS's *maid. She is in a perfectly plain black dress, and looks enormously more like a lady than* ETHEL.

MAID. Can I have your keys, madam?

MRS. BORRIDGE [*surprised*]. My keys?

MAID. The keys of your trunks, madam.

MRS. BORRIDGE. Certainly not. Who ever 'eard of such a thing?

MAID. I thought you might wish me to unpack for you, madam.

MRS. BORRIDGE [*bristling*]. Oh. *Did* you ! I don't want no strange girls ferriting in *my* boxes. [ETHEL *nudges her arm.*] What *is* it, Eth ? Oh, very well. But I'm not going to let her, all the same. No, thank you.

MRS. CASSILIS [*quite self-possessed.* LADY MARCHMONT *nervously avoids her eye*]. Mrs. Borridge will unpack for herself, Dorset. [MAID *bows, and turns to go out.*] Wait a moment. [MAID *pauses at door.*] Would you like to take off your things at once, Mrs. Borridge ? If so, Dorset shall show you your room. And I'll have some tea sent up to you there. You'll want it after your journey. [*Feels teapot.*] This is quite cold. What do you say, Ethel ?

ETHEL. Thank you, Mrs. Cassilis. A cup of tea would be very nice.

MRS. CASSILIS. Show Mrs. Borridge her room, Dorset. [MRS. BORRIDGE *rises.*] And take her up some tea. Dinner will be at eight. You'll ring if there's anything you want, won't you ?

MRS. BORRIDGE. Thank you, Mrs. Cassilis.

[MRS. BORRIDGE *waddles out, beaming. She feels that her first introduction to the houses of the great has gone off successfully.* GEOFFREY *holds the door open for them, and gives* ETHEL *a sly kiss in passing.* MRS. CASSILIS *makes no sign, but one can feel her shudder at the sound.* GEOFFREY *comes down to her a moment later, brimming with enthusiasm.*]

GEOFFREY. Well, mother, *what* do you think of her ? Isn't she *sweet ?*

MRS. CASSILIS [*gently*]. She's very pretty, Geoff.

[*Lays hand on his.*

GEOFFREY. And *good !* You don't know how *good* she is !

MRS. CASSILIS. So long as she's good to my boy that's all I ask.

GEOFFREY. Dearest mother. [*Kisses her demonstratively.*] Now I'll go and dress.

[*Goes out quickly, with a boyish feeling that he has been rather too demonstrative for a true-born Englishman. There is a long pause, during which* LADY MARCHMONT *looks at her sister,* MRS. CASSILIS *at nothing. The latter is evidently in deep thought, and seems to have almost forgotten her sister's presence. At last* LADY MARCHMONT *speaks with the stern accent of "I told you so."*]

LADY MARCHMONT. And *that's* the girl your son is to marry.

MRS. CASSILIS. Marry her! Nonsense, my dear Margaret.

[*The curtain falls.*]

ACT II

SCENE.—*The lawn at Deynham. Time, after breakfast the following morning. Under a tree stand two or three long wicker chairs, with bright red cushions. On the right stands the house, with windows open on to the terrace. A path on the left leads to the flower garden, and another on the same side to the strawberry beds. When the curtain rises,* MRS. CASSILIS *comes on to the terrace, followed by* ETHEL, *and a little later by* MRS. BORRIDGE. *The last-named is flushed with food, and gorgeously arrayed in a green silk blouse. She is obviously in the best of spirits, and is generally terribly at ease in Zion.*

MRS. CASSILIS. Shall we come out on the lawn? It's such a perfect morning.

ETHEL. That *will* be jolly, Mrs. Cassilis. [*They come down.*] When I'm in the country I shall always eat too much breakfast and then spend the morning on a long chair digesting it. So will mother.

MRS. BORRIDGE. How you go on, dearie!

MRS. CASSILIS. Try this chair, then. [*Slightly moving long chair forward.*] Mrs. Borridge, what kind of chair do *you* like?

MRS. BORRIDGE. This'll do. I'm not particular. [*Subsides into another long chair.*] Am I showing my ankles, Eth?

ETHEL. Sh! mother! [*Giggles.*

MRS. BORRIDGE. Well, I only asked, dearie.

MRS. CASSILIS. I wonder if you'd like a cushion for your head? Try this.

[*Puts vivid red cushion behind* MRS. BORRIDGE'S *vivid green blouse. The effect is electrifying.*]

MRS. BORRIDGE. That's better.

[MRS. CASSILIS *sinks negligently in wicker chair and puts up white lace parasol.*]

ETHEL [*sigh of content*]. I call this Heaven, Mrs. Cassilis.

MRS. CASSILIS. That's right, my dear. Are you fond of the country?

ETHEL. I don't know. I've never been there so far. Not to the real country, I mean. Mums and I have a week at Brighton now and then. And once we went for a month to Broadstairs after I had the measles. But that's not exactly country, is it?

MRS. CASSILIS. You're sure to like it. Geoffrey loves it. He's never so happy as when he's pottering about Deynham with his gun.

ETHEL. Doesn't he get tired of that?

MRS. CASSILIS. Oh no. Besides, he doesn't do that all the year round. He rides a great deal. We've very good hunting at Deynham. Are you fond of horses?

ETHEL. I can't bear them, Mrs. Cassilis.

MRS. BORRIDGE. When she was a little tot her father put 'er—her—on a pony and she fell off. It didn't hurt 'er, but the doctor said 'er nerve was shook. And now she can't bear 'orses.

MRS. CASSILIS. What a pity! I do hope you won't be dull while you're with us. Perhaps you're fond of walking?

ETHEL. Yes. I don't mind walking—for a little. If there's anything to walk *to*.

MRS. CASSILIS. We often walk up Milverton Hill on fine afternoons to see the view. It's the highest point about here.

ETHEL [*stifling a yawn*]. Is it, Mrs. Cassilis?

MRS. CASSILIS. And no doubt we shall find other things to amuse you. What *do* you like?

ETHEL. Oh, shops and theatres, and lunching at restaurants and dancing, and, oh, lots of things.

MRS. CASSILIS. I'm afraid we've no shops nearer than Leicester, and that's twelve miles away. And we've no restaurants at all. But I dare say we could get up a dance for you.

ETHEL [*clapping her hands*]. That'll be *sweet!* I simply *love* dancing. And all the rest of the time I shall sit on the lawn and grow fat, like mummy. [*Protest from* MRS. BORRIDGE.] Oh yes, I shall.

MRS. BORRIDGE. Ethel, don't be saucy.

ETHEL [*laughing*]. Mummy, if you scold me you'll have to go in. It's far too hot to be scolded.

MRS. BORRIDGE. Isn't she a spoilt girl, Mrs. Cassilis? What they taught you at that boarding school, miss, *I* don't know. Not manners, *I* can see.

ETHEL [*ruffling her mother's wig.*] There! there! mums. Was 'em's cross?

MRS. BORRIDGE [*pettishly*]. Stop it, Ethel, stop it, I say. Whatever will Mrs. Cassilis think of you!

MRS. CASSILIS [*smiling sweetly*]. Don't scold her, Mrs. Borridge. It's so pleasant to see a little high spirits, isn't it?

MRS. BORRIDGE [*beaming*]. Well, if *you* don't mind, Mrs. Cassilis, *I* don't. But it's not the way girls were taught to behave in *my* young days.

ETHEL [*slight yawn*]. That was so long ago, mums!

MRS. CASSILIS [*rising*]. Well, I must go and see after my housekeeping. Can you entertain each other while I'm away for a little? My sister will be down soon, I hope. She had breakfast in her room. And Geoffrey will be back in half an hour. I asked him to ride over to Milverton for me with a note.

ETHEL. We shall be all right, Mrs. Cassilis. Mother'll go to sleep. She always does if you make her too comfortable. And then she'll snore, won't you, mums?

[MRS. CASSILIS *goes into the house, smiling bravely to the last.*]

MRS. BORRIDGE [*alarmed*]. Ethel, you shouldn't talk like that before Mrs. Cassilis. She won't like it.

ETHEL. Oh yes, she will. And I'm going to make her like *me* awfully. What lovely clothes she has! I wish *you* had lovely clothes, mums.

MRS. BORRIDGE. What's the matter with my clothes, dearie? I 'ad on my best silk last night. And I bought this blouse special in the Grove only a week ago so as to do you credit.

ETHEL. I know. Still. . . . Couldn't you have chosen something *quieter?*

MRS. BORRIDGE. Oh no, dearie. I 'ate quiet things.

ETHEL. *H*ate, mother.

MRS. BORRIDGE. *H*ate, then. Give me something *cheerful.*

ETHEL [*hopelessly*]. Very well, mummy.

MRS. BORRIDGE [*imploring*]. But *do* be careful what you say before Mrs. Cassilis. She's not used to girls being so free.

ETHEL. Oh yes, she is, mums. All girls are like that nowadays. All girls that are ladies, I mean. They bet, and talk slang, and smoke cigarettes, and play bridge. I know all about that. I've read about it in "The Ladies' Mail." One of them put ice down her young man's back at dinner, and when he broke off his engagement she only laughed.

MRS. BORRIDGE [*lamentably*]. Oh dear, I do hope there won't be ice for dinner to-night.

ETHEL [*laughing*]. Poor mums, don't be anxious. I'll be *very* careful, I promise you.

MRS. BORRIDGE [*complaining*]. You're so 'eadstrong. And I *do* want to see you married and respectable. I wasn't always respectable myself, and I know what it means for a girl. Your sister Nan, she's gay, she is. She 'adn't no ambition. An' look what she is now!

ETHEL [*looking round nervously*]. If Geoff were to hear of it!

MRS. BORRIDGE. 'E won't. Not 'e! I've seen to that.

ETHEL. These things always get known somehow.

MRS. BORRIDGE. Nan's changed 'er name. Calls 'erself Mrs. Seymour. An' she never comes to see us now. If she did, I'd show 'er the door fast enough. Disgracin' us like that!

ETHEL. Poor Nan!

MRS. BORRIDGE [*warmly*]. Don't you pity 'er. She don't deserve it. She treated us like dirt. She's a bad 'un all through. I've done things myself as I didn't ought to 'ave done. But I've always *wanted* to be respectable. But it's not so easy when you've your living to make and no one to look to. [ETHEL *nods.*] Yes, I've 'ad my bad times, dearie. But I've pulled through them. And I *made* your father marry me. No one can deny that. It wasn't easy. An' I had to give him all my savings before 'e'd say "Yes." And even then I wasn't 'appy till we'd been to church. But 'e did marry me in the end. An' then *you* was born, an' I says my girl shall be brought up respectable. She shall be a lady. And some day, when she's married an' ridin' in her carriage, she'll say, "It's all mother's doing." [*Wipes her eyes in pensive melancholy.*

ETHEL. How long *were* you married to father, mums?

MRS. BORRIDGE. Only eight years, dearie. Before that I was 'is 'ousekeeper.

ETHEL. *His*, mummy.

MRS. BORRIDGE. Very well, dearie. [*With quiet satisfaction.*] Father drank 'isself to death the year Bend Or won the Derby. [*Shaking her head.*] He lost a pot o' money over that, and it preyed on 'is mind. So he took to the drink. If he 'adn't insured 'is life an' kep' the premiums paid we should 'ave been in the 'ouse, that's where we should 'ave been, dearie.

ETHEL. Poor dad!

MRS. BORRIDGE. Yes. 'E 'ad 'is faults. But 'e was

a kind-'earted man, was Joe Borridge. 'E died much respected. [*Cheering up.*] An' now you're engaged to a *real* gentleman! *That's* the sort for my Eth!

ETHEL. Oh! sh! mums. [*Looking round nervously.*

MRS. BORRIDGE. No one'll hear. And if they do, what's the harm? You've got 'is promise.

ETHEL. *His*, mother.

MRS. BORRIDGE. You can hold 'im—him—to it.

ETHEL [*nodding*]. Yes. Besides, Geoff's awfully in love with me. And I really rather like *him*, you know—in a way.

MRS. BORRIDGE. *I* know, dearie. Still, I'd get something from 'im on paper if I was you, something that'll 'old 'im. The men takes a bit of 'olding nowadays. They're that slippy! You get something that'll 'old 'em. That's what I always say to girls. Letters is best. Oh, the chances I've seen missed through not gettin' something on paper!

ETHEL [*confidently*]. You needn't worry, mummy. Geoff's all right.

MRS. BORRIDGE. I dare say. Still, I'd like something the lawyers can take hold of. Geoffy may get tired of *you*, dearie. Men are that changeable. *I* know them!

ETHEL [*viciously*]. He'd better not! I'd make him *pay* for it!

MRS. BORRIDGE. So you could, dearie, if you 'ad somethin' on paper. [ETHEL *shrugs impatiently.*] Well, if you won't, you won't. But if anythin' happens don't say I didn't warn you, that's all. I wish Geoffy was a lord, like Lord Buckfastleigh.

ETHEL. *I* don't.

MRS. BORRIDGE. Well, not *just* like Buckfastleigh, per'aps. But still, a lord. You never did like Buckfastleigh.

ETHEL. That old beast!

MRS. BORRIDGE [*remonstrating*]. He's been a good friend

to us, dearie. And he is an earl, whatever you may say.

ETHEL. Pah !

MRS. BORRIDGE. And he's rich. Richer than Geoffy. And he's awfully sweet on you, dearie. I believe he'd 'ave married you if 'is old woman 'ad turned up 'er toes last autumn. And he's seventy-three. He wouldn't 'ave lasted long.

ETHEL [*fiercely*]. I wouldn't marry him if he were twice as rich—and twice as old.

MRS. BORRIDGE [*placidly*]. I dare say you're right, dearie. He's a queer 'un is Buckfastleigh. But he offered to settle five thousand down if you'd go to Paris with 'im. Five thousand down on the nail. He wasn't what you'd call sober when he said it, but he meant it. I dare say he'd 'ave made it seven if you hadn't boxed 'is ears. [ETHEL *laughs.*] Wasn't I savage when you did that, dearie ! But you was right 'as it turned out. For Geoffy proposed next day. And now you'll be a real married woman. There's nothing like being married. It's so respectable. When you're married you can look down on people. And that's what every woman wants. That's why I pinched and screwed and sent you to boarding school. I said my girlie shall be a real lady. And she is.

[*Much moved at the reflection.*

ETHEL. Is she, mums ?

MRS. BORRIDGE. Of course, dearie. That's why she's 'ere. Deynham Abbey, *two* footmen in livery, fire in 'er bedroom, evenin' dress every night of 'er life. *Lady* Marchmont invited to meet her ! Everythin' tip top ! And it's not a bit too good for my girl. It's what she was made for.

ETHEL [*thoughtfully*]. I wish Johnny Travers had had some money. Then I could have married him.

MRS. BORRIDGE. *Married* 'im—him ! Married a auctioneer's clerk without twopence to bless 'isself. I should think not indeed ! Not likely !

ETHEL. Still, I was awfully gone on Johnny.

MRS. BORRIDGE [*decidedly*]. Nonsense, Eth. I should 'ope we can look 'igher than *that!*

ETHEL. Sh! mother. Here's Geoff.

[GEOFFREY, *in riding breeches, comes out of the house.*]

GEOFFREY. Good morning, dear. [*Kisses* ETHEL.] I thought I should be back earlier, but I rode over to Milverton for the mater. [*To* MRS. BORRIDGE.] Good morning.

MRS. BORRIDGE [*archly*]. You 'aven't no kisses to spare for *me*, 'ave you, Geoffy? Never mind. You keep 'em all for my girl. She's worth 'em.

GEOFFREY [*caressing her hand*]. Dear Ethel.

MRS. BORRIDGE. How well you look in those riding togs, Geoffrey! Don't 'e, Eth?

[*Endeavouring to hoist herself out of her chair.*

ETHEL [*smiling at him*]. Geoff always looks well in everything.

MRS. BORRIDGE. Well, I'll go indoors and leave you two to spoon. That's what you want, *I* know. I'll go and talk to your ma.

[*Waddles off into the house, beaming.*

GEOFFREY [*picking rose and bringing it to* ETHEL]. A rose for the prettiest girl in England.

ETHEL. Oh, Geoff, do you think so?

GEOFFREY. Of course. The prettiest and the best.

[*Takes her hand.*

ETHEL. You do really love me, Geoff, don't you?

GEOFFREY. Do you doubt it? [*Kisses her.*

ETHEL. No; you're much too good to me, you know.

GEOFFREY. Nonsense, darling.

ETHEL. It's the truth. You're a gentleman and rich, and have fine friends. While mother and I are common as common.

GEOFFREY [*firmly*]. You're *not.*

ETHEL. Oh yes, we are. Of course, I've been to school, and been taught things. But what's education?

It can't alter how we're made, can it? And she and I are the same underneath.

GEOFFREY. Ethel, you're not to say such things, or to think them.

ETHEL. But they're true, Geoff.

GEOFFREY. They're *not.* [*Kisses her.*] Say they're not.

ETHEL [*shakes her head*]. No.

GEOFFREY. Say they're *not.* [*Kisses her.*] *Not!*

ETHEL. Very well. They're not.

GEOFFREY. That's right. [*Kiss.*] There's a reward.

ETHEL [*pulling herself away*]. I wonder if I did right to say "Yes" when you asked me, Geoff? Right for *you*, I mean.

GEOFFREY. Of course you did, darling. You love me, don't you?

ETHEL. But wouldn't it have been best for you if I'd said "No"? Then you'd have married Lady Somebody or other, with lots and lots of money, and lived happy ever afterwards.

GEOFFREY [*indignantly*]. I shouldn't.

ETHEL. Oh yes, you would.

GEOFFREY. And what would *you* have done, pray?

ETHEL. Oh, I should have taken up with some one else, or perhaps married old Buckfastleigh when his wife died.

GEOFFREY. Ethel!

ETHEL. I should. I'm not the sort to go on moping for long. I should have been awfully down for a bit, and missed you every day. But by and by I should have cheered up and married some one else. I could have done it. I could!

GEOFFREY. And what about *me?*

ETHEL. Wouldn't you have been happier in the end, dear? I'm not the sort of wife you ought to have married. Some day I expect you'll come to hate me. [*Sighs.*] Heigho.

GEOFFREY [*softly*]. You know I shan't, dear.

ETHEL. But I did so want to marry a gentleman. Mother wanted it too. [*Quite simply.*] So I said "Yes," you see.

GEOFFREY [*drawing her to him*]. Darling!

[*Kisses her tenderly.*

ETHEL. Geoff, what did *your* mother say when you told her we were engaged? Was she dreadfully down about it?

GEOFFREY. No.

ETHEL. On your honour?

GEOFFREY. On my honour. Mother never said a single word to me against it. Lady Marchmont scolded me a bit. She's my aunt, you see.

ETHEL. Old cat!

GEOFFREY. And so did Lady Remenham. She's my godmother. But mother stood up for us all through.

ETHEL [*sighs*]. I shall never get on with all your fine friends, Geoff.

GEOFFREY. You will. Any one who's as pretty as my Ethel can get on anywhere.

ETHEL. Yes, I *am* pretty, aren't I? I'm glad of that. It makes a difference, doesn't it?

GEOFFREY. Of course. In a week you'll have them all running after you.

ETHEL [*clapping her hands*]. Shall I, Geoff? Won't that be splendid! [*Kisses him.*] Oh, Geoff, I'm so happy. When shall we be married?

GEOFFREY. I'm afraid not till next year, dear. Next June, mother says.

ETHEL [*pouting*]. That's a *long* way off, Geoff.

GEOFFREY. Yes, but mother says you're to be here a *great* deal between now and then, almost all the time, in fact. So it won't be so bad, will it?

ETHEL. Why does your mother want it put off till then?

GEOFFREY. Something about the London season, she said. We shall be married in London, of course, because your mother's house is there.

ETHEL. Oh yes, of course.

GEOFFREY. And besides, mother says she never believes in very short engagements. She says girls sometimes don't quite know their own minds. I said I was sure *you* weren't like that. But she asked me to promise, so I did.

ETHEL. Well, that's settled then. [*Jumping up.*] And won't it be nice to be *married?* Really *married!* . . . And now I want to *do* something. I'm tired of sitting still. What shall it be?

GEOFFREY [*with brilliant originality*]. We might go for a walk up Milverton Hill. The view there's awfully fine. [*Looks at watch.*] But there's hardly time before lunch.

ETHEL. Besides, I should spoil my shoes.

[*Puts out foot, the shoe of which is manifestly not intended for country walking.*]

GEOFFREY. Suppose we go to the strawberry beds and eat strawberries?

ETHEL. Oh yes, that'll be splendid. I can be so deliciously greedy over strawberries.

[*Puts her arm in his, and he leads her off to the strawberry beds. As they go off,* MRS. CASSILIS, LADY MARCHMONT, *and* MRS. BORRIDGE *come down from terrace.*]

MRS. CASSILIS. Going for a stroll, dears?

GEOFFREY. Only as far as the strawberry beds, mother dear.

MRS. CASSILIS. Oughtn't dear Ethel to have a hat? The sun is very hot there.

ETHEL. I've got a parasol, Mrs. Cassilis.

[*They disappear down the path.*

MRS. BORRIDGE [*rallying her*]. You weren't down to breakfast, Lady Marchmont.

LADY MARCHMONT. No, I—had a headache.

MRS. CASSILIS. Poor Margaret.

MRS. BORRIDGE [*sympathetically*]. It's 'eadachy weather, isn't it?

[*Subsiding into a chair.* MRS. BORRIDGE *makes it a rule of life never to stand when she can sit.*]

LADY MARCHMONT. I suppose it is.

MRS. BORRIDGE. Or perhaps it was the oyster patties last night? I've often noticed after an oyster I come over quite queer. Specially if it isn't *quite* fresh.

LADY MARCHMONT. Indeed!

MRS. BORRIDGE. Yes. But crabs is worse. Crabs is simply poison to me.

LADY MARCHMONT [*faintly*]. How extraordinary.

MRS. BORRIDGE. They are, I do assure you. If I touch a crab I'm that ill nobody would believe it.

MRS. CASSILIS. Well, Margaret, I expect you oughtn't to be talked to or it will make your head worse. You stay here quietly and rest while I take Mrs. Borridge for a stroll in the garden.

LADY MARCHMONT. Thank you. [*Closing her eyes.*] My head is a little bad still.

MRS. BORRIDGE [*confidentially*]. Try a drop of brandy, Lady Marchmont. My 'usband always said there's nothing like brandy if you're feeling poorly.

LADY MARCHMONT. Thank you. I think I'll just try what rest will do.

MRS. CASSILIS [*making* LADY MARCHMONT *comfortable*]. I expect that will be best. Put your head back, dear. Headaches are such trying things, aren't they, Mrs. Borridge? This way! And you're to keep quite quiet till luncheon, Margaret.

[LADY MARCHMONT *closes her eyes, with a sigh of relief. After a moment enter* BUTLER *from house, with* MRS. HERRIES.]

BUTLER. Mrs. Herries.

LADY MARCHMONT [*rises, and goes up to meet her*]. How do you do? Mrs. Cassilis is in the garden, Watson.

[*To* MRS. HERRIES.] She has just gone for a stroll with Mrs. Borridge.

MRS. HERRIES. Oh, pray don't disturb her. Pray don't. I can only stay for a moment. Literally a moment.

LADY MARCHMONT. But she would be so sorry to miss you. Will you let her know, Watson? She went that way.

[*Pointing to path along which* MRS. CASSILIS *went a moment before.*]

BUTLER. Yes, my lady.

LADY MARCHMONT. And how's the dear Rector? [*She and* MRS. HERRIES *sit.*] You've not brought him with you?

MRS. HERRIES. No. He was too busy. There is always so much to do in these *small* parishes, isn't there?

LADY MARCHMONT. Indeed?

MRS. HERRIES. Oh yes. There's the garden—and the pigs. The Rector is devoted to his pigs, you know. And his roses.

LADY MARCHMONT. The Rector's roses are quite famous, aren't they?

[*But* MRS. HERRIES *has not come to Deynham to talk horticulture, but to inquire about a far more interesting subject. She looks round cautiously, and then, lowering her voice to an undertone, puts the important question.*]

MRS. HERRIES. And now tell me, dear Lady Marchmont, before Mrs. Cassilis comes back, what is she like?

LADY MARCHMONT. Really, dear Mrs. Herries, I think I must leave you to decide that for yourself.

MRS. HERRIES [*sighs*]. So bad as that! The Rector feared so. And the mother? [*No answer.*] Just so! What a pity. An *orphan* is so much easier to deal with.

LADY MARCHMONT [*laughing slightly*]. You may be glad to hear that Mr. Borridge *is* dead.

MRS. HERRIES. So Mrs. Cassilis said. How fortunate! How very fortunate!

[MRS. CASSILIS, *followed by* MRS. BORRIDGE, *return from their walk.* WATSON *brings up the rear.*]

MRS. HERRIES. *Dear* Mrs. Cassilis, how do you do? [*Sympathetically.*] *How* are you?

MRS. CASSILIS [*rather amused at* MRS. HERRIES'S *elaborate bedside manner*]. Quite well, thanks. It's Margaret who is unwell.

MRS. HERRIES. Indeed! She didn't mention it.

LADY MARCHMONT [*hurriedly*]. I have a headache.

MRS. HERRIES. I'm so *sorry.*

MRS. CASSILIS [*sweetly*]. You have heard of my son's engagement, haven't you? Dear Ethel is with us now, I'm glad to say. Let me introduce you to her mother.

MRS. HERRIES. How do you do? [*Bows.*] What charming weather we're having, aren't we?

MRS. CASSILIS. You'll stay to luncheon now you are here, won't you?

[MRS. BORRIDGE *subsides into a chair.*]

MRS. HERRIES. I'm afraid I mustn't. I left the Rector at home. He will be expecting me.

MRS. CASSILIS. Why didn't you bring him with you?

MRS. HERRIES. So kind of you, dear Mrs. Cassilis. [*Nervously.*] But he hardly liked— How is *poor* Geoffrey?

MRS. CASSILIS [*cheerfully*]. He's very well. He's in the kitchen garden with Ethel. At the strawberry beds. You'll see them if you wait.

MRS. HERRIES [*hastily*]. I'm afraid I can't. In fact, I must run away at once. I only looked in in passing. It's nearly one o'clock, and the Rector always likes his luncheon at one. [*Shakes hands with gush of sympathetic fervour.*] Good-bye, dear Mrs. Cassilis. Good-bye, Mrs. Borridge. [*Bows.*

MRS. BORRIDGE [*stretching out her hand*]. Good-bye, Mrs.—I didn't rightly catch your name.

MRS. HERRIES. Herries. Mrs. Herries.

[*Shakes hands nervously.*

MRS. BORRIDGE [*heartily*]. Good-bye, Mrs. 'Erris.

MRS. CASSILIS. And you're coming over to dine on Thursday? That's to-day week, you know. *And* the Rector, of course. You won't forget?

MRS. HERRIES. With pleasure. Good-bye, Lady Marchmont.

[*Looks at* MRS. BORRIDGE, *who has turned away, then at* LADY MARCHMONT, *then goes off, much depressed, into the house. Pause.*]

MRS. BORRIDGE. I think I'll be going in too, Mrs. Cassilis, just to put myself straight for dinner.

MRS. CASSILIS. Yes. Do. Luncheon will be ready in half an hour.

[MRS. BORRIDGE *waddles off into the house complacently.* LADY MARCHMONT *sinks limply into a chair, with a smothered groan.* MRS. CASSILIS *resumes her natural voice.*]

How's your headache, Margaret? Better?

LADY MARCHMONT. Quite well. In fact, I never had a headache. That was a little deception on my part, dear, to excuse my absence from the breakfast table. Will you forgive me?

[MRS. CASSILIS *nods without a smile. She looks perfectly wretched.* LADY MARCHMONT *makes a resolute effort to cheer her up by adopting a light tone, but it is obviously an effort.*]

Breakfasts *are* rather a mistake, aren't they? So trying to the temper. And that awful woman! I felt a brute for deserting you. On the very first morning too. But I didn't feel strong enough to face her again so soon. How *could* Geoffrey do it!

MRS. CASSILIS [*grimly*]. Geoffrey's not going to marry *Mrs.* Borridge.

LADY MARCHMONT. He's going to marry the daughter. And she'll grow like her mother ultimately. All girls do, poor things.

MRS. CASSILIS [*sighs*]. Poor Geoffrey. I suppose there's something wrong in the way we bring boys up. When they reach manhood they seem quite unable to distinguish between the right sort of woman and—the other sort. A pretty face, and they're caught at once. It's only after they've lived for a few years in the world and got soiled and hardened—got what we call experience, in fact—that they even begin to understand the difference.

LADY MARCHMONT [*decidedly*]. You ought to have sent Geoffrey to a public school. His father ought to have insisted on it.

MRS. CASSILIS. Poor Charley died when Geoff was only twelve. And when I was left alone I couldn't make up my mind to part with him. Besides, I hate the way public school boys look on women.

LADY MARCHMONT. Still, it's a safeguard.

MRS. CASSILIS [*dismally*]. Perhaps it is.

[*Neither of the sisters speaks for a moment. Both are plunged in painful thought. Suddenly* LADY MARCHMONT *looks up and catches sight of* MRS. CASSILIS's *face, which looks drawn and miserable. She goes over to her with something like a cry.*]

LADY MARCHMONT. My dear Adelaide, don't look like that. You frighten me.

MRS. CASSILIS [*pulling herself together*]. What's the matter?

LADY MARCHMONT. Your face looked absolutely *grey!* Didn't you sleep last night?

MRS. CASSILIS. Not very much. [*Trying to smile.*] Has my hair gone grey, too?

LADY MARCHMONT. Of course not.

MRS. CASSILIS. I feared it might.

LADY MARCHMONT. You poor dear!

MRS. CASSILIS [*impulsively*]. I *am* pretty still, am I not, Margaret?

LADY MARCHMONT. My dear, you look perfectly sweet, as you always do. Only there *are* one or two little lines I hadn't noticed before. But your *hair's* lovely.

MRS. CASSILIS [*eagerly*]. I'm glad of that. I shall need all my looks now—for Geoffrey's sake.

LADY MARCHMONT [*puzzled*]. Geoffrey's?

MRS. CASSILIS. Looks mean so much to a man, don't they? And he has always admired me. Now I shall want him to admire me more than ever.

LADY MARCHMONT. Why, dear?

MRS. CASSILIS [*with cold intensity*]. Because I have a rival.

LADY MARCHMONT. This detestable girl?

MRS. CASSILIS [*nods*]. Yes.

LADY MARCHMONT. My dear Adelaide, isn't it too late now?

MRS. CASSILIS. Too late? Why, the time has scarcely begun. At present Geoffrey is over head and ears in love with her. While that goes on we can do nothing. [*With absolute conviction.*] But it won't last.

LADY MARCHMONT [*surprised at her confidence*]. Won't it?

MRS. CASSILIS. No. That kind of love never does. It dies because it is a thing of the senses only. It has no foundation in reason, in common tastes, common interests, common associations. So it dies. [*With a bitter smile.*] *My* place is by its deathbed.

LADY MARCHMONT [*with a slight shudder*]. That sounds rather ghoulish.

MRS. CASSILIS. It *is*.

LADY MARCHMONT [*more lightly*]. Are you going to do anything to hasten its demise?

MRS. CASSILIS [*quite practical*]. Oh yes. In the first place, they're to stay here for a *long* visit. I want them to feel thoroughly at home. Vulgar people are so much more vulgar when they feel at home, aren't they?

LADY MARCHMONT. You can hardly expect any change in that direction from *Mrs.* Borridge.

MRS. CASSILIS [*a short, mirthless laugh*]. I suppose not. [*Practical again.*] Then I shall ask lots of people to meet them. Oh, *lots* of people. So that Geoffrey may have the benefit of the contrast. I've asked Mabel to stay, by the way—for a week—to help to entertain *dear* Ethel. When those two are together it should open Geoffrey's eyes more than anything.

LADY MARCHMONT. Love is blind.

MRS. CASSILIS [*briskly*]. It sees a great deal better than it used to do, dear. Far better than it did when *we* were young people. [*Pause.*

LADY MARCHMONT. Anything else?

MRS. CASSILIS. Not at the moment. [*A ghost of a smile.*] Yes, by the way. There's Major Warrington.

LADY MARCHMONT [*shocked*]. You're not really going to consult that dissipated wretch?

MRS. CASSILIS [*recklessly*]. I would consult the Witch of Endor if I thought she could help me—and if I knew her address. Oh, I'm prepared to go any lengths. I wonder if he would elope with her for a consideration?

LADY MARCHMONT [*horrified*]. Adelaide, you wouldn't do that. It would be dreadful. Think of the scandal.

MRS. CASSILIS. My dear, if she would elope with Watson, I'd raise his wages. [*Rises.*

LADY MARCHMONT. Adelaide!

MRS. CASSILIS [*defiantly*]. I *would.* Ah, Margaret, you've no children. [*Her voice quivering and her eyes shining with intensity of emotion.*] You don't know how it feels to see your son wrecking his life and not be able to prevent it. I love my son better than anything else in the

whole world. There is nothing I wouldn't do to save him. That is how mothers are made. That's what we're for.

LADY MARCHMONT [*slight shrug*]. Poor girl!

MRS. CASSILIS [*fiercely*]. You're *not* to pity her, Margaret. I forbid you. She tried to steal away my son.

LADY MARCHMONT. Still——

MRS. CASSILIS [*impatiently*]. Margaret, don't be sentimental. The girl's not in *love* with Geoffrey. Anyone can see that. She's in love with his position and his money, the money he will have some day. She doesn't really care two straws for him. It was a trap, a trap from the beginning, and poor Geoff blundered into it.

LADY MARCHMONT. She couldn't *make* the omnibus horse fall down!

MRS. CASSILIS. No. That was chance. But after that she set herself to catch him, and her mother egged her on no doubt, and taught her how to play her fish. And you pity her!

LADY MARCHMONT [*soothingly*]. I don't really. At least, I did for a moment. But I suppose you're right.

MRS. CASSILIS [*vehemently*]. Of course I'm right. I'm Geoffrey's mother. Who should know if I don't? Mothers have eyes. If she really cared for him I should know. I might try to blind myself, but I should *know*. But she doesn't. And she shan't marry him. She shan't!

LADY MARCHMONT. My dear, don't glare at me like that. *I'm* not trying to make the match.

MRS. CASSILIS. Was I glaring?

LADY MARCHMONT. You looked rather tigerish. [MRS. CASSILIS *gives short laugh. Pause.*] By the way, as she's *not* to be your daughter-in-law, is it necessary to be quite so affectionate to her all the time? It rather gets on my nerves.

MRS. CASSILIS. It is absolutely necessary. If there

were any coolness between us the girl would be on her guard, and Geoffrey would take her side. That would be fatal. Geoffrey must never know how I feel towards her. No! When this engagement is broken off I shall kiss her affectionately at parting, and when the carriage comes round I shall shed tears.

LADY MARCHMONT [*wondering*]. Why?

MRS. CASSILIS. Because otherwise it would make a division between Geoffrey and me. And I couldn't bear that. I must keep his love whatever happens. And if I have to deceive him a little to keep it, isn't that what we women always have to do? In fact, I shall have to deceive everybody except you. Lady Remenham, Mrs. Herries, the whole county. If they once knew they would be sure to talk. Lady Remenham never does anything else, does she? And later on, when the engagement was all over and done with, Geoffrey would get to hear of it, and he'd never forgive me.

LADY MARCHMONT. My dear, your unscrupulousness appals me. [MRS. CASSILIS *shrugs impatiently.*] Well, it's not very *nice*, you must admit.

MRS. CASSILIS [*exasperated*]. Nice! Of course it's not *nice!* Good heavens, Margaret, you don't suppose I *like* doing this sort of thing, do you? I do it because I must, because it's the only way to save Geoffrey. If Geoffrey married her he'd be miserable, and I won't have that. Of course it would be *pleasanter* to be perfectly straightforward, and tell the girl I detest her. But if I did she'd marry Geoff if only to spite me. So I must trap her as she has trapped him. It's not a *nice* game, but it's the only possible one. [*More calmly.*] Yes, I must be on the best of terms with Ethel. [*With a smile of real enjoyment at the thought.*] And *you* must make friends with that appalling mother.

LADY MARCHMONT [*firmly*]. *No*, Adelaide! I refuse!

MRS. CASSILIS [*crosses to her*]. You must. You *must!* [*Takes her two hands and looks into her eyes.*

LADY MARCHMONT [*giving way, hypnotised*]. Very well. I'll do my best. [MRS. CASSILIS *drops her hands and turns away with a sigh of relief.*] But I shan't come down to breakfast! There are limits to my endurance. [*Plaintive.*] And I do so hate breakfasting in my room. The crumbs always get into my bed.

MRS. CASSILIS [*consoling her*]. Never mind. When we've won you shall share the glory.

LADY MARCHMONT [*doubtfully*]. You're going to win?

MRS. CASSILIS [*nods*]. I'm going to win. I've no doubt whatever about that. I've brains and she hasn't. And brains always tell in the end. Besides, she did something this morning which made me sure that I should win.

LADY MARCHMONT [*trying to get back her old lightness of tone*]. She didn't eat with her knife?

MRS. CASSILIS [*resolutely serious*]. No. She—*yawned.*

LADY MARCHMONT [*puzzled*]. Yawned?

MRS. CASSILIS. Yes. Three times. When I saw that I knew that I should win.

LADY MARCHMONT [*peevish*]. My dear Adelaide, what *do* you mean?

MRS. CASSILIS. Girls like that can't endure boredom. They're used to excitement, the vulgar excitement of Bohemian life in London. Theatres, supper parties, plenty of fast society. She owned as much this morning. Well, down here she shall be dull, oh, how *dull!* I will see to that. The curate shall come to dinner. And old Lady Bellairs, with her tracts and her trumpet. I've arranged that it shall be a *long* engagement. She shall yawn to some purpose before it's over. And when she's bored she'll get cross. You'll see. She'll begin to quarrel with her mother, and nag at Geoffrey—at every one, in fact, except me. *I* shall be too sweet to her for that. [*With a long look into her sister's eyes.*] And that will be the beginning of the end.

LADY MARCHMONT [*turning away her eyes with something like a shiver*]. Well, dear, I think your plan diabolical. [*Rising.*] But your courage is perfectly splendid, and I love you for it. [*Lays hand on her shoulder for a moment caressingly.*] And now I'll go in and get ready for lunch.

[LADY MARCHMONT *turns to go into the house. As she does so the* BUTLER *comes out, followed by* MABEL *in riding habit.* MRS. CASSILIS'S *manner changes at once. The intense seriousness with which she has been talking to her sister disappears in an instant, and instead you have the charming hostess, without a care in the world, only thinking of welcoming her guest and making her comfortable. It is a triumph of pluck—and breeding.*]

BUTLER. Lady Mabel Venning.

MRS. CASSILIS [*rising*]. Ah, Mabel dear, how are you? [*Kisses her.*] You've ridden over? But you're going to *stay* here, you know. Haven't you brought your things?

MABEL. Mamma is sending them after me. It was such a perfect morning for a ride. How do you do, Lady Marchmont? [*Shaking hands.*

MRS. CASSILIS. That's right. Watson, tell them to take Lady Mabel's horse round to the stables. She will keep it here while she is with us. [*To* MABEL.] Then you'll be able to ride every day with Geoffrey. [*To* LADY MARCHMONT.] Poor Ethel doesn't ride. Isn't it unfortunate?

LADY MARCHMONT. Very!

MRS. CASSILIS. She and Geoffrey are down at the strawberry beds spoiling their appetites for luncheon. Would you like to join them?

MABEL. I think not, thanks. It's rather hot, isn't it? I think I'd rather stay here with you.

MRS. CASSILIS. As you please, dear. [*They sit.*

MABEL. Oh, before I forget, mamma asked me to tell you she telegraphed to Uncle Algernon yesterday,

and he's coming down next Wednesday. She had a letter from him this morning by the second post. It came just before I started. Such a funny letter. Mamma asked me to bring it to you to read.

MRS. CASSILIS [*taking letter, and reading it aloud to her sister*]. "My dear Julia,—I am at a loss to understand to what I owe the honour of an invitation to Milverton. I thought I had forfeited all claim to it for ever. I can only suppose you have at last found an heiress to marry me. If this is so I may as well say at once that unless she is both extremely rich and extremely pretty I shall decline to entertain her proposal. My experience is that that is a somewhat unusual combination. I will be with you next Wednesday. —Your affectionate brother, A. L. Warrington." [*Giving back letter.*] That's right, then. And now I think I'll just go down to the kitchen garden and tell Geoffrey you're here. [*Rises.*] No, don't come too. You stay and entertain Margaret.

[*She goes off by the path leading to the strawberry beds.*

LADY MARCHMONT. Dear Major Warrington. He always was the most delightfully witty, wicked creature. I'm so glad he's coming while I'm here. Adelaide must be sure and ask him over.

MABEL. Uncle Algernon is coming over to dine this day week—with mamma.

LADY MARCHMONT. To be sure; I remember.

Enter GEOFFREY *quickly from garden.*

GEOFFREY. Halloa, Mabel! How do you do? [*Shaking hands.*] I didn't know you were here.

MABEL. Mrs. Cassilis has just gone to tell you.

GEOFFREY. I know. She met us as we were coming back from eating strawberries. We've been perfect pigs. She and Ethel will be here in a moment. I ran on ahead.

LADY MARCHMONT [*rising*]. Well, it's close on lunch time. I shall go in and get ready.

[LADY MARCHMONT *goes off into the house, leaving the young people together. They begin to chatter at once with the easy familiarity of long acquaintance.*]

GEOFFREY. You rode over?

[*Sitting on the arm of her chair.*

MABEL. Yes, on Basil. He really is the sweetest thing. I like him much better than Hector.

GEOFFREY. Poor old Hector. He's not so young as he was.

MABEL. No.

[GEOFFREY *suddenly remembers that there is something more important than horses which he has to say before* ETHEL *arrives. He hesitates for a moment, and then plunges into his subject.*]

GEOFFREY. Mabel. . . . There's something I want to ask you.

MABEL. Is there?

GEOFFREY. Yes. But I don't know how to say it.

[*Hesitates again.*

MABEL [*smiling*]. Perhaps you'd better not try, then?

GEOFFREY. I must. I feel I ought. It's about something Aunt Margaret said yesterday. . . . [*Blushing a little.*] Mabel, did you ever . . . did I ever . . . did I ever do anything to make you think I . . . I was going to ask you to marry me?

[*Looking her bravely in the face.*

MABEL [*turning her eyes away*]. No, Geoff.

GEOFFREY. Sure?

MABEL. Quite sure.

GEOFFREY. I'm glad.

MABEL [*looking up, surprised*]. Why, Geoff?

GEOFFREY. Because from what Aunt Margaret said I was afraid, without intending it, I'd . . . I—hadn't been quite honourable.

MABEL [*gently*]. You have always been everything that is honourable, Geoff. And everything that is kind.

GEOFFREY [*relieved*]. Thank you, Mabel. You're a brick, you know. And we shall always be friends, shan't we?

MABEL. Always. [*Rises.*

GEOFFREY. And you'll be friends with Ethel too?

MABEL. If she'll let me.

GEOFFREY. Of course she'll let you. She's the dearest girl. She's ready to be friends with everybody. And she'll *love* you, I know. [*Stands up.*] You promise? [*Holds out hand.*

MABEL [*takes it*]. I promise.

[MRS. CASSILIS *and* ETHEL *enter at this moment from garden.* MRS. CASSILIS *has her arm in* ETHEL'S, *and they make a picture of mutual trust and affection which would make* LADY MARCHMONT *scream. Luckily, she is safely in her room washing her hands.* MRS. CASSILIS *smiles sweetly at* MABEL *as she speaks, but does not relax her hold on her future daughter-in-law.*]

MRS. CASSILIS. Not gone in to get ready yet, Mabel?

MABEL. No. Lady Marchmont only went a minute ago.

MRS. CASSILIS [*to* ETHEL]. You've not met Mabel yet, have you? I must introduce you. Miss Borridge—Lady Mabel Venning. [*Sweetly.*] I want you two to be *great* friends! [*They shake hands.*] And now come in and get ready for luncheon.

[*They all move towards the house as the curtain falls.*]

ACT III

SCENE.—*The smoking-room at Deynham. A week has elapsed since the last Act, and the time is after dinner. The room has two doors, one leading to the hall and the rest of the house, the other communicating with the billiard-room. There is a fireplace on the left, in which a fire burns brightly. A writing-table occupies the centre of the stage. Further up is a grand piano. By its side a stand with music on it. Obviously a man's room from the substantial writing-table, with the cigar-box on it, and the leather-covered arm-chairs. "The Field" and "The Sportsman" lie on a sofa hard by. The room is lighted by lamps. The stage is empty when the curtain rises. Then* GEOFFREY *enters from hall. He crosses to the door of the billiard-room, opens it, and looks in. Then turns and speaks to* MAJOR WARRINGTON, *who has just entered from hall.* WARRINGTON *is a cheerful, rather dissipated-looking man of five-and-forty.*

GEOFFREY. It's all right, Warrington. They've lighted the lamps.

WARRINGTON. Good.

[*Strolling across towards fireplace.*

GEOFFREY [*at door of billiard-room*]. How many will you give me?

WARRINGTON. Oh, hang billiards! I'm not up to a game to-night. That was only an excuse to get away from the women. I believe that's why games were invented. But if you *could* get me a whisky and soda I should be your eternal debtor. Julia kept such an infernally strict watch

on me all the evening that I never got more than a glass and a half of champagne. A fellow can't get along on *that*, can he?

GEOFFREY. I'll ring.

WARRINGTON. Do. .There's a good fellow. [GEOFFREY *rings.*] Every man requires a certain amount of liquid per day. I've seen the statistics in "The Lancet." But Julia never reads "The Lancet." Women never do read anything, I believe.

GEOFFREY. Have another cigar?

WARRINGTON. Thanks. Don't mind if I do. [*Takes one and lights it.*] Aren't you going to?

GEOFFREY [*who looks seedy and out of spirits*]. No, thanks.

Enter FOOTMAN, *with whisky and soda.*

Whisky and soda, James.

FOOTMAN. Yes, sir.

[*Puts it on small table and goes out.*

WARRINGTON. Off your smoke?

GEOFFREY. Yes. [*Pouring whisky.*] Say when.

WARRINGTON. When. [*Takes soda.*] You're not going to have one?

GEOFFREY. No.

WARRINGTON. Off your drink?

GEOFFREY. Yes.

WARRINGTON. That's bad. What's the matter?

[*Selects comfortable easy-chair and sits lazily.*

GEOFFREY. Oh, nothing. I'm a bit out of sorts, I suppose.

WARRINGTON. How well your mother looks to-night, by the way! Jove, what a pretty woman she is!

GEOFFREY. Dear mother.

WARRINGTON [*sips whisky meditatively*]. How does she like this marriage of yours?

GEOFFREY [*offhand*]. All right.

WARRINGTON. Ah! [*Nods.*] Bites on the bullet. No offence, my dear fellow. I like her pluck.

GEOFFREY [*exasperated*]. I assure you, you're mistaken. My mother's been kindness itself over my engagement. She's never said a word against it from the first. I believe she's the only person in this infernal county who hasn't.

WARRINGTON. Except myself.

GEOFFREY. Except yourself. And *you* think me a thundering young fool.

WARRINGTON. Oh no.

GEOFFREY. Oh yes. I could see you looking curiously at me all through dinner—when you weren't eating—as if I were some strange beast. You think I'm a fool right enough.

WARRINGTON [*stretching himself luxuriously*]. Not at all. Miss Borridge is a very pretty girl, very bright, very amusin'. I sat next her at dinner, you know. Not quite the sort one *marries*, perhaps—as a rule——

GEOFFREY [*crossly*]. What do you mean?

WARRINGTON [*shrugs*]. Anyhow, *you're* going to marry her. So much the better for *her*. What amuses me is your bringing her old reprobate of a mother down here. The cheek of it quite takes away my breath.

GEOFFREY [*peevish*]. What's the matter with her mother? She's common, of course, and over-eats herself, but lots of people do that. And she's good-natured. That's more than some women are.

WARRINGTON [*looking thoughtfully at the end of his cigar*]. Still, she's scarcely the sort one introduces to one's *mother*, eh? But I'm old-fashioned, no doubt. There's no saying what you young fellows will do. Your code is peculiarly your own.

[*Wanders across in quest of another whisky and soda.*

GEOFFREY [*restively*]. Look here, Warrington, what do you mean?

WARRINGTON [*easily*]. Want to hit me in the eye,

don't you? *I* know. Very natural feeling. Lots of people have it.

GEOFFREY [*sulkily*]. Why shouldn't I introduce her to my mother?

WARRINGTON. Well, she's a disreputable old woman, you know. She lived with Borridge for years before he married her. The other daughter's— [*Shrugs shoulders.*] And then to bring her down here and introduce her to Julia! Gad, I like your humour.

GEOFFREY [*much perturbed at his companion's news*]. Are you sure?

WARRINGTON [*nonchalantly*]. Sure? Why, it's common knowledge. Everybody knows old Borridge, and most people loathe her. I don't. I rather like her in a way. She's so splendidly vulgar. Flings her aitches about with reckless indifference. And I like her affection for that girl. She's really fond of *her*. So much the worse for you, by the way. You'll never be able to keep them apart.

GEOFFREY [*irritably*]. Why should I want to keep them apart?

WARRINGTON. Why should you—? [*Drinks.*] Oh, well, my dear chap, if *you're* satisfied——

GEOFFREY [*low voice*]. Her sister . . . ? Poor Ethel! Poor Ethel!

WARRINGTON [*with a good-natured effort to make the best of things*]. My dear chap, don't be so down in the mouth. There's no use fretting. I'd no idea you were so completely in the dark about all this, or I wouldn't have told you. Cheer up.

GEOFFREY [*huskily*]. I'm glad you told me.

WARRINGTON. To think you've been engaged all this time and never found it out! What amazing innocence! [*Chuckling.*] Ha! Ha! . . . Ha! Ha! Ha!

GEOFFREY. Don't. [*Sinks on to sofa with a groan.*

WARRINGTON. Sorry, my dear boy. But it's so devilish amusing.

GEOFFREY. How blind I've been! How utterly blind!

WARRINGTON [*shrugs shoulders*]. Well, I rather like a chap who's a bit of an ass myself.

GEOFFREY. Poor mother!

WARRINGTON. Doesn't she know? Not about old Borridge? [GEOFFREY *shakes his head.*] She must! Women always do. They have an instinct about these things that is simply uncanny. It's often highly inconvenient too, by the way. She probably says nothing on *your* account.

GEOFFREY [*dismally*]. Perhaps so. Or Ethel's. She's been wonderfully kind to Ethel ever since she came down. Perhaps that's the reason. [*Rises.*] After all, it's not Ethel's fault.

WARRINGTON. Of course not. [*Looks at him curiously, then, with an instinct of kindliness, goes to him and lays hand on shoulder.*] Well, here's luck, my dear boy, and I won't say may you never repent it, but may you put off repenting it as long as possible. That's the best one can hope of most marriages.

GEOFFREY [*drily*]. Thanks!

WARRINGTON. Well, it's been an uncommon amusin' evening. Mrs. Herries' face has been a study for a life-time. And as for Julia's—oh, outraged respectability! What a joy it is!

[*Further conversation is interrupted by the entrance of the other guests from the hall. These are* LADY REMENHAM, LADY MARCHMONT, MRS. HERRIES, MRS. BORRIDGE, ETHEL, *and* MABEL. *Last of all comes the* RECTOR, *with* MRS. CASSILIS. *They enter with a hum of conversation.*]

RECTOR [*to his hostess*]. Well, he's a disreputable poaching fellow. It's no more than he deserved.

MRS. CASSILIS [*nods dubiously*]. Still, I'm sorry for his wife.

MRS. HERRIES. I'll send down to her in the morning and see if she wants anything.

MRS. BORRIDGE [*beaming with good-humour*]. So this is where you gentlemen have got to!

GEOFFREY. I brought Major Warrington to smoke a cigar.

LADY REMENHAM [*looking fixedly at whisky, then at* WARRINGTON.] Algernon!

WARRINGTON [*protesting*]. My dear Julia, I believe there is nothing unusual in a man's requiring *one* whisky and soda at this time in the evening.

LADY REMENHAM. I trust it has been only one.

[*Sits on sofa, where she is joined by* LADY MARCHMONT.

WARRINGTON [*changing the subject*]. Whom have you been sending to jail for poaching now, Rector? No Justice's justice, I hope?

RECTOR. Old Murcatt. He's one of Mrs. Cassilis's tenants. A most unsatisfactory fellow. He was caught red-handed laying a snare in the Milverton woods. It was a clear case.

[ETHEL *stifles a yawn.*]

ETHEL. I should have thought there was no great harm in that.

RECTOR. My dear young lady!

MRS. CASSILIS. Take care, Ethel dear. An Englishman's hares are sacred.

MRS. BORRIDGE. How silly! I can't bear 'are myself.

[*Seats herself massively in arm-chair in front of piano. An awkward silence follows this insult to hares. As it threatens to grow oppressive, the* RECTOR *tries what can be done with partridges to bridge the gulf.*]

RECTOR. You'll have plenty of partridges this year, Mrs. Cassilis. We started five coveys as we drove here.

MRS. CASSILIS [*acknowledging his help with a smile*]. We generally have a good many.

[ETHEL, *stifling another yawn, strolls to piano, opens it, and strikes a note or two idly.*]

MABEL. You play, I know, Ethel. Won't you play something?

ETHEL [*sulkily*]. No.

[*Turns away, closing piano sharply. Another constrained silence.*]

MRS. HERRIES. I saw you out riding to-day, Mabel. I looked in at Dobson's cottage. Poor fellow, I'm afraid he's very ill.

MABEL. Yes. I was with Geoffrey. We had a long ride, all through Lower Milverton and Carbury to Mirstoke. It was delightful.

MRS. BORRIDGE [*to* MRS. HERRIES]. Your husband has a lot of that sort of thing to do down here, I suppose, Mrs. 'Erris?

MRS. HERRIES [*with frosty politeness*]. When people are ill they generally like a visit from a clergyman, don't they?

MRS. BORRIDGE [*bluntly*]. Well, there's no accounting for tastes. My 'usband, when he was ill, wouldn't 'ave a parson *near* 'im. Said it gave 'im the creeps.

[*Another silence that can be felt.* WARRINGTON's *shoulders quiver with delight, and he chokes hurriedly into a newspaper.*]

LADY MARCHMONT [*crossing to fire, with polite pretence that it is the physical, not the social, atmosphere that is freezing her to the bone.*] How sensible of you to have a fire, Adelaide.

MRS. CASSILIS [*throwing her a grateful look*]. It is pleasant, isn't it? These July evenings are often cold in the country.

[ETHEL *stifles a prodigious yawn.*]

GEOFFREY [*going to her*]. Tired, Ethel?

ETHEL [*pettishly*]. No.

[*Glowers at him. He turns away with slight shrug. There is yet another awkward pause.*]

MRS. CASSILIS [*rising nervously*]. Won't somebody play billiards? Are the lamps lighted, Geoffrey?

GEOFFREY. Yes, mother.

MRS. CASSILIS. Or shall we play pyramids? Then we can all join in. [*Persuasively.*] *You'll* play, Mrs. Borridge, I'm sure?

MRS. BORRIDGE [*beaming*]. I'm on.

MRS. CASSILIS. You, Lady Remenham?

LADY REMENHAM. No, thanks. Mrs. Herries and I are going to stay by the fire and talk about the Rector's last sermon.

[*The* RECTOR *raises hands in horror.*]

MRS. CASSILIS. You, Margaret!

LADY MARCHMONT. No, really. I've never played pyramids in my life.

MRS. BORRIDGE [*in high good-humour*]. Then it's 'igh time you began, Lady Marchmont. *I'll* teach you.

[MRS. CASSILIS *looks entreaty.* LADY MARCHMONT *assents, smiling.*]

LADY MARCHMONT. Very well. To please you, dear Mrs. Borridge!

[LADY MARCHMONT *goes off to billiard-room, followed a moment later by* MABEL.]

MRS. CASSILIS. You, Mabel? That's three. Ethel four.

ETHEL. No, thank you, Mrs. Cassilis. I won't play.

MRS. BORRIDGE. Why not, Eth? You're a nailer at pyramids.

ETHEL [*pettishly*]. Because I'd rather not, mother.

[*Turns away.*

MRS. BORRIDGE. All right, dearie. You needn't snap my nose off.

[*Goes off to billiard-room with unruffled cheerfulness.*

MRS. CASSILIS. Geoffrey five. The Rector six.

RECTOR. Very well, if you won't play for money. I've no conscientious objections to playing for money, but whenever I do it I always lose. Which comes to the same thing. [*Follows* MRS. BORRIDGE *off.*

MRS. CASSILIS. You, Major Warrington, of course?

WARRINGTON [*laughing*]. No, thanks. I shall stay here and flirt with Mrs. Herries.

MRS. CASSILIS. Very well. How many did I say? Six, wasn't it? And myself seven. Coming, Geoff?

GEOFFREY. All right, mother.

[GEOFFREY *looks doubtfully at* ETHEL *for a moment, and even takes a step towards her, but she takes no notice of him. Baffled, he turns to his mother, who leads him off after the others.* LADY REMENHAM *settles herself comfortably in arm-chair above the fireplace.* MRS. HERRIES *takes another by her, and they begin to gossip contentedly.* ETHEL *looks sullenly in their direction.* WARRINGTON *makes a valiant effort to retrieve his glass from the mantelpiece, with a view to replenishing it with whisky.*]

LADY REMENHAM. Now, Mrs. Herries, draw up that chair to the fire, and we'll talk scandal.

WARRINGTON [*stretching out hand towards glass*]. The Rector's sermon, Julia!

LADY REMENHAM. Algernon!

[*He stops dead.* ETHEL *seats herself in the arm-chair behind the writing-table, puts her elbows on the table, and glares into vacancy, looking rather like a handsome fury. Presently* WARRINGTON *joins her. She yawns with unaffected weariness.* WARRINGTON *looks at her with an amused smile.*]

WARRINGTON. Bored, Miss Borridge?

ETHEL. I wonder.

WARRINGTON [*draws up chair by her*]. I don't. [*She laughs.*] Life isn't very lively down here till the shooting begins.

ETHEL [*drumming with her fingers on table*]. I don't shoot. So I'm afraid that won't help me much.

WARRINGTON. I remember. Nor ride, I think you told me?

ETHEL [*yawns*]. Nor ride.

WARRINGTON. Gad. I'm sorry for you.

ETHEL [*looking curiously at him*]. I believe you really are.

WARRINGTON. Of course I am.

ETHEL. I don't know about "of course." Except for Mrs. Cassilis—and poor Geoff—who doesn't count—I don't find much sympathy in *this* part of the country. Heigho! How they hate me!

WARRINGTON [*protesting*]. No, no.

ETHEL. Oh yes, they do. Every one of them. From Watson, who pours out my claret at dinner, and would dearly love to poison it, to your sister, who is glaring at us at this moment.

[*As, indeed,* LADY REMENHAM *is doing with some intensity. She highly disapproves of her brother's attentions to* ETHEL, *but, as there is no very obvious method of stopping them, she says nothing. Presently she and* MRS. HERRIES *begin a game of bezique, and that for the time, at least, distracts her attention from her brother's depravity.*]

WARRINGTON [*looking up and laughing*]. Dear Julia. She never had any manners.

ETHEL. She's no worse than the rest. Mrs. Herries would do just the same if she dared. And as for Mabel——!

WARRINGTON. Don't hit it off with Mabel?

ETHEL. Oh, we don't quarrel, if that's what you mean, or call one another names across the table. I wish we did.

I could beat her at that. We're as civil as the Devil. [*He laughs.*] What *are* you laughing at?

WARRINGTON. Only at the picturesqueness of your language.

ETHEL [*shrugs*]. Yes, Mabel despises me, and I *hate* her.

WARRINGTON. Why?

ETHEL [*wearily*]. Because we're different, I suppose. She's everything I'm not. She's well-born and well-bred. Her father's an earl. Mine was a bookmaker.

WARRINGTON. Is that all?

ETHEL [*bitterly*]. No. She's running after Geoffrey. [WARRINGTON *looks incredulous.*] She is!

WARRINGTON [*raising eyebrows*]. Jealous?

ETHEL. Yes. I am jealous. Little beast! [*Picks up flimsy paper-knife.*] I'd like to *kill* her.

[*Makes savage jab with knife. It promptly breaks.*

WARRINGTON [*taking pieces out of her hand*]. Don't be violent.

[*Carries pieces blandly to fire.* ETHEL *stares straight in front of her. Meantime* LADY REMENHAM *has been conversing in an undertone with* MRS. HERRIES, *occasionally glancing over her shoulder at the other two. In the sudden hush which follows* WARRINGTON'S *movement towards the fireplace her voice suddenly becomes alarmingly audible.*]

LADY REMENHAM. Such a common little thing, too! And *I* don't even call her pretty.

MRS. HERRIES. It's curious how Mrs. Cassilis seems to have taken to her.

LADY REMENHAM. Yes. She even tolerates that awful mother. [*Irritably.*] What *is* it, Algernon?

WARRINGTON [*blandly*]. Only a little accident with a paper-knife.

[LADY REMENHAM *grunts.* WARRINGTON *returns to* ETHEL.]

MRS. HERRIES [*lowering her voice discreetly*]. For Geoffrey's sake, of course. She's so devoted to him.

LADY REMENHAM. It may be that. *I'm* inclined to think her mind has given way a little. I asked her about it last week.

[*The two ladies drop their voices again to a murmur, but* ETHEL *has heard the last remark or two, and looks like murder.*]

WARRINGTON [*sitting by* ETHEL *and resuming interrupted thread*]. You were going to tell me what makes you think Mabel is in love with Geoffrey.

ETHEL. Was I?

WARRINGTON. Weren't you?

ETHEL. Well, perhaps I will.

WARRINGTON. Go ahead.

ETHEL. She's staying here, and they're always together. They ride almost every morning. I can't ride, you know. And Geoffrey loves it.

WARRINGTON. You should take to it.

ETHEL. I did try one day. They were just starting when I suddenly said I'd like to go with them.

WARRINGTON [*starting*]. What did they say to that?

ETHEL. Oh, Mabel pretended to be as pleased as possible. She lent me an old habit, and Geoff said they'd let me have a horse that was as quiet as a lamb. Horrid kicking beast!

WARRINGTON. What horse was it?

ETHEL. It was called Jasmine, or some such name.

WARRINGTON. Mrs. Cassilis's mare? Why, my dear girl, she hasn't a kick in her.

ETHEL. Hasn't she! . . . Anyhow, we started. So long as we walked it was all right, and I began to think I might actually get to like it. But soon we began to trot—and that was *awful.* I simply screamed. The beast stopped at once. But I went on screaming till they got me off.

WARRINGTON. What did Geoffrey say?

ETHEL. Nothing. But he looked terrible. Oh, how he despised me!

WARRINGTON. Poor girl.

ETHEL. They brought me back, walking all the way. And Geoff offered to give up riding in the mornings if I liked. [WARRINGTON *whistles.*] But, of course, I had to say no. So now they go out together every day, and often don't come back till lunch.

WARRINGTON. And what do *you* do?

ETHEL [*wearily*]. I sit at home and yawn and yawn. [*Does so.*] Mrs. Cassilis take me out driving sometimes. She does what she can to amuse me. But of course she's busy in the mornings.

WARRINGTON. What does Mrs. Borridge do?

ETHEL. Lady Marchmont looks after her. I believe she gets a kind of pleasure in leading her on and watching her make a fool of herself. Old cat! And mother sees nothing. She's as pleased with herself as possible. She's actually made Lady Marchmont promise to come and stay with us in London!

WARRINGTON. Bravo, Mrs. Borridge!

ETHEL. So I sit here in the drawing-room with a book or the newspaper and I'm bored! bored!

WARRINGTON. And Geoffrey!

ETHEL. He doesn't seem to notice. If I say anything to him about it he just says I'm not *well!* He's very kind and tries to find things to amuse me, but it's a strain. And so it goes on day after day. Heigho! [*A short silence.*

WARRINGTON. Well, my dear, I admire your courage.

ETHEL [*surprised*]. What do you mean?

WARRINGTON. A lifetime of this! Year in year out. Till you can yawn yourself decently into your grave.

ETHEL [*alarmed*]. But it won't always be like this. We shan't *live* here, Geoff and I.

WARRINGTON. Oh yes, you will. Mrs. Cassilis was

talking only at dinner of the little house she was going to furnish for you both down here, just on the edge of the Park. So that you could always be near her.

ETHEL. But Geoff has his profession.

WARRINGTON. His profession is only a name. He makes nothing at it. And never will. Geoffrey's profession is to be a country gentleman and shoot pheasants.

ETHEL. But we shall have a house in London as well.

WARRINGTON [*shaking his head*]. Not you. As long as his mother lives Geoffrey will be dependent on her, you know. He has nothing worth calling an income of his own. And he's proud. He won't accept more from her than he's obliged even if her trustees would allow her to hand over anything substantial to him on his marriage—which they wouldn't.

ETHEL [*defiantly*]. I shall refuse to live down here.

WARRINGTON. My dear, you won't be asked. You'll have to live where Mrs. Cassilis provides a house for you. Besides, Geoff will prefer it. He likes the country, and he's devoted to his mother.

ETHEL. Phew !

WARRINGTON. Happily, it won't last for ever. I dare say you'll have killed poor Mrs. Cassilis off in a dozen years or so. Though you never know how long people will last nowadays, by the way. These modern doctors are the devil.

ETHEL. Kill her off ? What do you mean ? I don't want to kill Mrs. Cassilis. I like her.

WARRINGTON [*looking at her in genuine astonishment*]. My dear young lady, you don't suppose you'll be able to *stand* this sort of thing, do you ? Oh no. You'll kick over the traces, and there'll be no end of a scandal, and Geoff'll blow his brains out—if he's got any—and she'll break her heart, and that'll be the end of it.

ETHEL [*fiercely*]. It won't.

WARRINGTON. Oh yes, it will. You don't know what County Society is. The dulness of it! How it eats into your bones. *I* do.

ETHEL. Does it bore *you* too?

WARRINGTON. Bore? It bores me to *tears!* I'm not a bad lot really. At least, no worse than most middle-aged bachelors. But Julia thinks me an utterly abandoned character, and I take care not to undeceive her. Why? Because I find Milverton so intolerable. I used to come down every Christmas. One of those ghastly family reunions. A sort of wake without the corpse. At last I couldn't stand it, and did something perfectly outrageous. I forget what, but I know the servants all gave warning. So now I'm supposed to be thoroughly disreputable, and that ass Remenham won't have me asked to the house. Thank Heaven for that!

ETHEL. But Geoff likes the country.

WARRINGTON. I dare say. But Geoffrey and I are different. So are Geoffrey and you. You and I are town birds. He's a country bumpkin. *I* know the breed!

ETHEL [*in horror*]. And I shall have to stand this all my life! All my life! [*Savagely.*] I won't! I won't!

WARRINGTON [*calmly*]. You will!

ETHEL. I won't, I tell you! [WARRINGTON *shrugs.*] It's too sickening. [*Pause. She seems to think for a moment, then grasps him by the arm, and speaks eagerly, dropping her voice, and looking cautiously over towards the others.*] I say, let's go off to Paris, you and I, and leave all this. It'd be awful fun.

WARRINGTON [*appalled, rising*]. Hush! Hush! For God's sake. Julia'll hear.

ETHEL [*almost in a whisper*]. Never mind. What does it matter? Let's go. You'd enjoy it like anything. We'll have no end of a good time.

WARRINGTON [*shaking himself free, desperately*]. My dear young lady, haven't I just told you that I'm not that

sort at all? I'm a perfectly respectable person, of rather austere morality than otherwise.

ETHEL. Rot! You'll come?

[*Grasping his arm again.*

WARRINGTON. No, I won't. I decline. I can't go off with the girl my host is going to marry. It wouldn't be decent. Besides, I don't want to go off with anybody.

ETHEL [*her spirits dropping to zero*]. You won't?

WARRINGTON [*testily*]. No, I won't. And, for goodness' sake, speak lower. Julia's listening with all her ears.

ETHEL [*with a bitter little laugh*]. Poor Major Warrington! How I scared you!

WARRINGTON. I should say you did. I'm not so young as I was. A few years ago, a little thing like that never made me turn a hair. Now I can't stand it.

[*Subsiding into chair and wiping the perspiration from his brow.*]

ETHEL. You've gone through it before, then?

WARRINGTON. More than once, my dear.

ETHEL [*dismally*]. And now *you'll* look down on me too.

WARRINGTON [*trying to cheer her up*]. On the contrary, I admire you immensely. In fact, I don't know which I admire more, your pluck or your truly marvellous self-control. To ask me to go off with you without letting Julia hear! [*Looking anxiously towards her.*] It was masterly.

ETHEL [*sighs*]. Well, I suppose I shall have to marry Geoff after all.

WARRINGTON. I suppose so. Unless you could go off with the Rector.

[*She laughs shrilly. The two ladies turn sharply and glare.*]

ETHEL. Now I've shocked your sister again.

WARRINGTON. You have. She thinks I'm flirting with you. That means I shan't be asked down to Milverton

for another five years. Thank Heaven for that! Ah, here are the billiard players.

[*He rises, with a sigh of relief. The conversation has been amusing, but not without its perils, and he is not altogether sorry to have it safely over.* ETHEL *remains seated, and does not turn again. The billiard players troop in, headed by* MABEL, GEOFFREY *holding open the door for them.*]

GEOFFREY [*to* MABEL]. You fluked outrageously, you know.

MABEL [*entering*]. I didn't!

GEOFFREY. Oh yes, you did. Didn't she, mother?

MRS. CASSILIS [*smiling at her*]. Disgracefully.

MRS. BORRIDGE. You'll soon learn, Lady Marchmont, if you practise a bit.

LADY MARCHMONT. Do you think so?

LADY REMENHAM. Well, who won, Rector?

MRS. BORRIDGE. *I* did.

LADY REMENHAM. Indeed?

[*Turns frigidly away, losing all interest at once.*

MRS. BORRIDGE [*obstinately cheerful and friendly*]. Why didn't *you* play, Mrs. 'Erris?

MRS. HERRIES [*frigid smile*]. I never play games.

MRS. BORRIDGE. You should learn. I'd teach you.

MRS. HERRIES [*who longs to be as rude as* LADY REMENHAM *but has not quite the courage.*] Thank you. I fear I have no time.

[*Joins* LADY REMENHAM *again, ruffling her feathers nervously.*]

MRS. CASSILIS. Ethel dear, we missed *you* sadly. I hope you haven't been dull?

ETHEL [*with hysterical laugh*]. Not at all. Major Warrington has been entertaining me.

RECTOR. I suspect Miss Borridge felt there would be no opponent worthy of her steel.

[ETHEL *shrugs her shoulders rudely. He turns away.*]

MRS. CASSILIS [*as a last resort*]. I wonder if we could have some music now. Mabel dear, won't you sing to us?

MABEL. I've got nothing with me.

GEOFFREY. Do sing, Mabel. There'll be lots of things you know here. [*Opens the piano.*] Let me find something. Schumann?

MABEL [*shakes head*]. I think not.

[*Joins him in searching music stand.*

MRS. CASSILIS. Sing us that Schubert song you sang when we were dining with you last, dear.

MABEL. Very well. Where's Schubert, Geoffrey?

ETHEL [*to* WARRINGTON]. Do you see that?

[*Watching* GEOFFREY'S *and* MABEL'S *heads in close proximity. Seems as if she were about to jump from her chair.* WARRINGTON *restrains her by a hand on her arm.*]

WARRINGTON. Sh! Be quiet, for Heaven's sake.

ETHEL [*hisses*]. The little *cat!*

MABEL. Here it is. Geoff, don't be silly.

[*Turns to piano.*

MRS. CASSILIS. Can you see there?

MABEL. Yes, thank you.

[*She sings two verses of Schubert's "Adieu," in German, very simply, in a small but sweet voice. While she sings the behaviour of the guests affords a striking illustration of the English attitude towards music after dinner.* GEOFFREY *stands by piano prepared to turn over when required.* LADY REMENHAM *sits on sofa in an attitude of seraphic appreciation of her daughter's efforts.* LADY MARCHMONT, *by her side, is equally enthralled—and thinks of something else.* MRS. HERRIES *gently beats time with her fan.* MRS. CASSILIS *is sweetly appreciative. The* BORRIDGES, *on the contrary, fall sadly below the standard of polite attention required of them.* ETHEL, *who has begun by glaring defiantly at* MABEL *during*

the first few bars of the song, rapidly comes to the conclusion that she can't sing, and decides to ignore the whole performance. MRS. BORRIDGE *begins by settling herself placidly to the task of listening. She is obviously puzzled and rather annoyed when the song turns out to be German, but decides to put up with it with a shrug, hoping it will soon be over. At the end of the first verse she turns to* MRS. CASSILIS *to begin to talk, but that lady, with a smile and a gesture, silences her, and the second verse begins. At this* MRS. BORRIDGE'S *jaw falls, and, after a few bars, she frankly addresses herself to slumber. Her purple, good-natured countenance droops upon her shoulder as the verse proceeds, and when she wakes up at the end it is with a visible start.* WARRINGTON, *meantime, has disgraced himself in the eyes of his sister by talking to* ETHEL *during the opening bars of the second verse, and has only been reduced to silence by the stony glare which she thenceforward keeps fixed upon him till the last bar. In self-defence, he leans back in his chair and contemplates the ceiling resolutely.*]

GEOFFREY [*clapping*]. Bravo ! Bravo !

RECTOR. Charming, charming.

LADY MARCHMONT [*to* LADY REMENHAM]. What a sweet voice she has.

MRS. CASSILIS. Thank you, dear.

RECTOR [*to* MABEL, *heartily*]. Now we must have another.

GEOFFREY. Do, Mabel.

MABEL. No. That's quite enough.

RECTOR [*with resolute friendliness*]. Miss Borridge, *you* sing, I'm sure.

MRS. BORRIDGE. Do, dearie. [*To* LADY REMENHAM.] My girl has a wonderful voice, Lady Remling. Quite like a professional. Old Jenkins at the Tiv. used to say she'd make a fortune in the 'alls.

LADY REMENHAM [*frigidly*]. Indeed ?

ETHEL. I don't think I've any songs anyone here would care for.

MRS. BORRIDGE. Nonsense, dearie. You've lots of songs. Give them "The Children's 'Ome."

ETHEL [*rising*]. Well, I'll sing if you like.

GEOFFREY [*going to her*]. Shall I find you something, Ethel?

ETHEL [*snaps*]. No!

[GEOFFREY *turns away snubbed, and joins* MABEL. ETHEL *goes to the piano, where she is followed a moment later by* WARRINGTON, *who stands behind it, facing audience, and looking much amused as her song proceeds.* ETHEL *takes her seat at piano. There is a moment's pause while she darts a glance at* GEOFFREY *standing with* MABEL. *Then she seems to make up her mind, and, without prelude of any kind, plunges into the following refined ditty:*

When Joey takes me for a walk, me an' my sister Lue,
'E puts 'is arms round both our waists, as lots o' men will do.
We don't allow no liberties, and so we tells 'im plain,
And Joey says 'e's sorry—but 'e does the same again!

(*Spoken*) Well, we're not going to have that, you know. Not likely! We're not that sort. So we just says to 'im:

Stop that, Joey! Stow it, Joe!
Stop that ticklin' when I tell yer toe.
You're too free to suit a girl like me,
Just you stop that ticklin' or I'll slap yer!

When Joe an' me is man an' wife—I thinks 'e loves me true,
I 'ope 'e'll go on ticklin' me—and leave off ticklin' Lue.
'E'll have to leave the girls alone, and mind what 'e's about,
Or 'im an' me an' Lucy 'ill precious soon fall out.

(*Spoken*) Yes, I'm not going to put up with that sort

of thing once we're married. Not I. If 'e tries it on I shall just sing out straight :

Now then, all of you. [*Looks across impudently towards* LADY REMENHAM, *who bristles with indignation.*]

Stop that, Joey ! Chuck it, Joe !
Stop that ticklin' when I tell yer toe.
You're too free to suit a girl like me,
Just you drop that ticklin' or I'll slap yer !

[*Sings chorus fortissimo, joined by her delighted mother and by* WARRINGTON, *who beats time sonorously on the top of the piano. For this attention she slaps him cordially on the cheek at the last line, by way of giving an artistic finish to the situation, and then rises, flushed and excited, and stands by the piano, looking defiantly at her horrified audience.*]

WARRINGTON. Splendid, by Jove ! Capital !

[*That, however, is clearly not the opinion of the rest of the listeners, for the song has what is called a "mixed" reception. The ladies, for the most part, had originally settled themselves into their places prepared to listen to anything which was set before them with polite indifference. A few bars, however, suffice to convince them of the impossibility of that attitude.* LADY REMENHAM, *who is sitting on the sofa by* LADY MARCHMONT, *exchanges a horrified glance with that lady, and with* MRS. HERRIES *on the other side of the room.* MABEL *looks uncomfortable. The* RECTOR *feigns abstraction.* MRS. CASSILIS *remains calm and sweet, but avoids every one's eye, and more particularly* GEOFFREY'S, *who looks intensely miserable. But* WARRINGTON *enjoys himself thoroughly, even down to the final slap, and as for* MRS. BORRIDGE, *her satisfaction is unmeasured. She beats time to the final chorus, wagging her old head and joining in in stentorian accents, finally jumping up from her chair, clapping her hands, and crying, "That's right, Eth. Give 'em another." In fact, she feels that the*

song has been a complete triumph for her daughter, and a startling vindication of Old Jenkins's good opinion of her powers. Suddenly, however, she becomes conscious of the horrified silence which surrounds her. The cheers die away on her lips. She looks round the room, dazed and almost frightened, then hurriedly reseats herself in her chair, from which she has risen in her excitement, straightens her wig, and—there is an awful pause.]

MRS. CASSILIS [*feeling she must say something*]. Won't you come to the fire, Ethel? You must be cold out there.

ETHEL. Thank you, Mrs. Cassilis. I'm not cold.

WARRINGTON. Jove, Miss Borridge, I'd no idea you could sing like that.

ETHEL [*with a sneer*]. Nor had Geoffrey.

LADY REMENHAM [*rising*]. Well, we must be getting home. Geoffrey, will you ask if the carriage is round?

GEOFFREY. Certainly, Lady Remenham. [*Rings.*

MRS. HERRIES. We must be going, too. Come, Hildebrand. [*Rising also.*

LADY REMENHAM. Are you coming with us, Mabel?

MRS. CASSILIS. Oh no, I can't spare Mabel yet. She has promised to stay a few days more.

LADY REMENHAM. Very well.

Enter BUTLER.

GEOFFREY. Lady Remenham's carriage.

BUTLER. It's at the door, sir.

GEOFFREY. Very well.

Exit BUTLER.

LADY REMENHAM. Good-bye then, dear. Such a pleasant evening. Good night, Mabel. We shall expect you when we see you.

[*General leave-takings.*]

MRS. HERRIES. Good-bye, Mrs. Cassilis.

MRS. BORRIDGE. Good night, Lady Remling.

[*Holds out hand with nervous cordiality.*

LADY REMENHAM. Good night.

[*Sweeps past her with icy bow.* MRS. BORRIDGE *retires crushed to a chair by fire, and consoles herself with illustrated paper.*]

LADY REMENHAM [*to* WARRINGTON, *who is devoting his last moments to* MISS BORRIDGE]. Algernon.

WARRINGTON. Coming, Julia. [*To* ETHEL.] See you in London, then?

GEOFFREY [*stiffly*]. You'll take another cigar, Warrington—to light you home?

WARRINGTON. Thanks. Don't mind if I do.

[GEOFFREY *hands box.*]

LADY REMENHAM [*sternly*]. Algernon. We're going to get on our wraps.

[MRS. CASSILIS *and* LADY REMENHAM, MRS. HERRIES *and the* RECTOR, *go out.*]

WARRINGTON. All right, Julia. I shall be ready as soon as you are.

GEOFFREY [*motioning to whisky*]. Help yourself, Warrington. [*Goes out after the others.*

WARRINGTON [*to* ETHEL, *after helping himself to drink*]. Well, my dear, I'm afraid you've done it *this* time!

ETHEL. Done what?

WARRINGTON. Shocked them to some purpose! It was magnificent, but it was scarcely tactics, eh?

ETHEL. I suppose not. [*Fiercely.*] But I *wanted* to shock them! Here have they been despising me all the evening for nothing, and when that detestable girl with a voice like a white mouse sang her German jargon, praising

her sky-high, I said I'd show them what singing means ! And I did !

WARRINGTON. You certainly did ! Ha ! ha ! You should have seen Julia's face when you boxed my ears. If the earth had opened her mouth and swallowed you up like Korah, Dathan and the other fellow, it couldn't have opened wider than Julia's.

ETHEL. Well, she can scowl if she likes. She can't hurt me now.

WARRINGTON. I'm not so sure of that.

ETHEL. She'll have to hurry up. We go to-morrow.

WARRINGTON. Ah, I didn't know. Well, there's nothing like exploding a bomb before you leave, eh ? Only it's not always safe—for the operator.

GEOFFREY [*re-entering with* MRS. CASSILIS]. The carriage is round, Warrington. Lady Remenham's waiting.

WARRINGTON. The deuce she is ! [*Swallows whisky and soda.*] I must fly. Good-bye again. Good-bye, Mrs. Cassilis. A thousand thanks for a most interesting evening.

[WARRINGTON *goes out with* GEOFFREY. *Pause.* ETHEL *stands sullen by fireplace.*]

MRS. BORRIDGE [*yawning cavernously*]. Well, I think I shall turn in. Good night, Mrs. Cassilis. [*General handshakes.*] Coming, Eth ?

ETHEL. In a moment, mother.

[MRS. BORRIDGE *waddles out, with a parting smile from* LADY MARCHMONT. GEOFFREY *returns from seeing* WARRINGTON *off the premises.* MRS. BORRIDGE *wrings his hand affectionately in passing.*]

LADY MARCHMONT. I must be off too. And so must you, Mabel. You look tired out.

[*Kisses* MRS. CASSILIS. GEOFFREY *opens door for them.*

MABEL. I am a little tired. Good night.

Exeunt LADY MARCHMONT *and* MABEL.

GEOFFREY. Are you going, mother?

MRS. CASSILIS. Not at once. I've a couple of notes to write.

[GEOFFREY *crosses to fire.* MRS. CASSILIS *goes to writing-table centre, sits facing audience, and appears to begin to write notes.* GEOFFREY *goes up to* ETHEL *thoughtfully. A silence. Then he speaks in a low tone.*]

GEOFFREY. Ethel.

ETHEL. Yes. [*Without looking up.*

GEOFFREY. Why did you sing that song to-night?

ETHEL [*with a sneer*]. To please Lady Remenham.

GEOFFREY. But, Ethel! That's not the sort of song Lady Remenham likes at all.

ETHEL [*impatiently*]. To shock her, then.

GEOFFREY. Ethel!

ETHEL. I think I managed it too!

GEOFFREY. I don't understand. You're joking, aren't you?

ETHEL. Joking!

GEOFFREY. I mean you didn't really do it on purpose to make Lady Remenham angry. I'm sure you didn't.

ETHEL [*very distinctly*]. I tell you I did it on purpose, deliberately, to shock Lady Remenham. I suppose I ought to know.

GEOFFREY [*astonished*]. But why? What made you do such a thing?

ETHEL [*savagely*]. I did it because I chose. Is that plain enough?

GEOFFREY. Still, you must have had a *reason.* [*No answer. Suspiciously.*] Did that fellow Warrington tell you to sing it?

ETHEL [*snaps*]. No.

GEOFFREY. I thought perhaps . . . Anyhow, promise me not to sing such a song again here. [*Silence.*] You will promise?

ETHEL. Pooh !

GEOFFREY. Ethel, be reasonable. You must know you can't go on doing that sort of thing here. When we are married we shall live down here. You must conform to the ideas of the people round you. They may seem to you narrow and ridiculous, but you can't alter them.

ETHEL. *You* don't think them narrow and ridiculous, I suppose ?

GEOFFREY. No. In this case I think they are right. In many cases.

ETHEL. Sorry I can't agree with you.

GEOFFREY [*gently*]. Ethel dear, don't let's quarrel about a silly thing like this. If you are going to marry me you *must* take my judgment on a matter of this kind.

ETHEL [*defiantly*]. *Must* I ?

GEOFFREY. Yes.

ETHEL. Then I won't. So there. I shall do just exactly as I please. And if you don't like it you can do the other thing. I'm not going to be bullied by you.

GEOFFREY [*reasoning with her*]. My dear Ethel, I'm sure I am never likely to bully you, or to do or say anything that is unkind. But on a point like this I can't give way.

ETHEL. Very well, Geoff. If you think that you'd better break off our engagement, that's all.

GEOFFREY. Ethel ! [*With horror.*

ETHEL [*impatiently*]. Well, there's nothing to make faces about, is there ?

GEOFFREY. You don't *mean* that. You don't mean you *want* our engagement to come to an end !

ETHEL. Never mind what I want. What do *you* want ?

GEOFFREY [*astonished*]. Of course I want it to go on. You know that.

ETHEL [*gesture of despair*]. Very well, then. You'd better behave accordingly. And now, if you've finished your lecture, I'll go to bed. Good night.

[*Is going out, with only a nod to* MRS. CASSILIS, *but she kisses her good night gently.* GEOFFREY *holds door open for her to go out, then goes and stands by fire.* MRS. CASSILIS, *who has watched this scene while appearing to be absorbed in her notes, has risen to go to her room.*]

MRS. CASSILIS [*cheerfully*]. Well, I must be off too! Good night, Geoffrey. [*Kisses him.*

GEOFFREY [*absently*]. Good night, mother. [MRS. CASSILIS *goes slowly towards door.*] Mother.

MRS. CASSILIS [*turning*]. Yes, Geoff.

GEOFFREY. Mother, you don't think I was unreasonable in what I said to Ethel, do you?

MRS. CASSILIS [*seems to think it over*]. No, Geoff.

GEOFFREY. Or unkind?

MRS. CASSILIS. No, Geoff.

GEOFFREY. I was afraid. She took it so strangely.

MRS. CASSILIS. She's rather over-excited to-night, I think. And tired, no doubt. [*Encouragingly.*] She'll be all right in the morning.

GEOFFREY. You think I did right to speak to her about that song?

MRS. CASSILIS. Quite right, dear. Dear Ethel still has a little to learn, and, of course, it will take time. But we must be patient. Meantime, whenever she makes any little mistake, such as she made to-night, I think you should certainly speak to her about it. It will be such a help to her! I don't mean *scold* her, of course, but speak to her gently and kindly, just as you did to-night.

GEOFFREY [*despondently*]. It didn't seem to do any good.

MRS. CASSILIS. One never knows, dear. Good night.

[*Kisses him and goes out. He stands thoughtfully looking into the fire, and the curtain falls.*]

ACT IV

SCENE.—*The morning-room at Deynham. Time, after breakfast next day. A pleasant room, with French windows at the back open on to the terrace. The sun is shining brilliantly. There is a door to hall on the left. On the opposite side of the room is the fireplace. When the curtain rises* MABEL *and* GEOFFREY *are on the stage.* GEOFFREY *stands by the fireplace.* MABEL *is standing by the open window.* GEOFFREY *looks rather out of sorts and dull.*

MABEL. What a lovely day!

GEOFFREY [*absently*]. Not bad.

[*Pulls out cigarette case.*

MABEL. I'm sure you smoke too much, Geoffrey.

GEOFFREY [*smiles*]. I think not.

Enter MRS. CASSILIS *from hall.*

MRS. CASSILIS. Not gone out yet, dears? Why, Mabel, you've not got your habit on.

MABEL. We're not going to ride this morning.

MRS. CASSILIS [*surprised*]. Not going to ride?

MABEL. No. We've decided to stay at home to-day for a change.

MRS. CASSILIS. But why, dear?

MABEL [*hesitating*]. I don't know. We just thought so. That's all.

MRS. CASSILIS. But you must have some reason. You and Geoffrey haven't been quarrelling, have you?

MABEL [*laughing*]. Of course not.

MRS. CASSILIS. Then why aren't you going to ride?

MABEL. Well, we thought Ethel might be dull if we left her all alone.

MRS. CASSILIS. Nonsense, dears. *I'll* look after Ethel. Go up and change, both of you, at once. Ethel would be dreadfully grieved if you gave up your ride for her. Ethel's not selfish. She would never allow you or Geoffrey to give up a pleasure on her account. [*Crosses to bell.*

GEOFFREY. Well, Mabel, what do you say? [*Going to window.*] It is a ripping day.

MABEL. If Mrs. Cassilis thinks so.

MRS. CASSILIS. Of course I think so. Run away, dears, and get your things on. I'll tell them to send round the horses. [*Rings.*

GEOFFREY. All right. Just for an hour. Come on, Mabel. I'll race you to the end of the passage.

[*They run out together, nearly upsetting* FOOTMAN *who enters at the same moment.*]

MRS. CASSILIS. Lady Mabel and Mr. Geoffrey are going out riding. Tell them to send the horses round. And tell Hallard I want to see him about those roses. I'm going into the garden now.

FOOTMAN. Very well, madam.

[*Exit* FOOTMAN. MRS. CASSILIS *goes out into the garden. A moment later* MRS. BORRIDGE *and* ETHEL *come in from the hall.*]

MRS. BORRIDGE [*looking round, then going to easy-chair*]. Mrs. Cassilis isn't here?

ETHEL [*sulky*]. I dare say she's with the housekeeper.

MRS. BORRIDGE. Very likely. [*Picks up newspaper.*] Give me a cushion, there's a good girl. [ETHEL *does so.*] Lady Marchmont isn't down yet, I suppose.

ETHEL. No. [*Turns away.*

MRS. BORRIDGE [*putting down paper*]. What's the matter, dearie? You look awfully down.

ETHEL. Nothing.

[*Goes to window and stares out into the sunlight.*

MRS. BORRIDGE. I wish Lady Marchmont came down to breakfast of a morning.

ETHEL [*shrugs*]. Do you?

MRS. BORRIDGE. Yes. It's dull without her. She and I are getting quite chummy.

ETHEL [*irritably, swinging round*]. Chummy! My dear mother, Lady Marchmont's only laughing at you.

MRS. BORRIDGE. Nonsense, Ethel. Laughing at *me*, indeed! I should like to see her!

ETHEL. That's just it, mother. You never will.

MRS. BORRIDGE. Pray, what do you mean by *that*, miss?

ETHEL [*hopeless*]. Oh, it doesn't matter.

[*Goes to fireplace and leans arm on mantelpiece, depressed.*

MRS. BORRIDGE. Now you're sneering at me, and I won't 'ave it—have it. [*Silence.*] Do you 'ear?

ETHEL. Yes, I *h*ear. [*Stares down at fender.*

MRS. BORRIDGE. Very well, then. Don't let me 'ave any more of it. [*Grumbling to herself.*] Laughing, indeed! [*Pause. Recovering her composure.*] Where's Geoffy?

ETHEL. I don't know.

MRS. BORRIDGE. Out riding, I suppose?

ETHEL. Very likely.

MRS. BORRIDGE. 'E only finished breakfast just before us.

ETHEL. *He*, mother.

MRS. BORRIDGE. Dear, dear, 'ow you do go on! You leave my aitches alone. *They're* all right.

ETHEL [*sighs*]. I wish they were! [*Pause.*] You've not forgotten we're going away to-day, mother?

MRS. BORRIDGE. To-day? 'Oo says so?

ETHEL. We were only invited for a week.

MRS. BORRIDGE. Were we, dearie? I don't remember.

ETHEL. *I* do. There's a train at 12.15, if you'll ask Mrs. Cassilis about the carriage.

MRS. BORRIDGE [*flustered*]. But I've not let Jane know. She won't be expecting us.

ETHEL. We can telegraph.

MRS. BORRIDGE. Can't we stay another day or two? I'm sure Mrs. Cassilis won't mind. And I'm very comfortable here.

ETHEL [*firmly*]. *No*, mother.

MRS. BORRIDGE. Why not?

ETHEL [*exasperated*]. In the first place because we haven't been asked. In the second, because I don't want to.

MRS. BORRIDGE. Don't want to?

ETHEL [*snappishly*]. No. I'm sick and tired of this place.

MRS. BORRIDGE. Are you, dearie? I thought we were gettin' on first-rate.

ETHEL. *Did* you? Anyhow, we're going, thank goodness, and that's enough. Don't forget to speak to Mrs. Cassilis. I'll go upstairs and pack.

[*As she is crossing the room to go out* MRS. CASSILIS *enters from garden and meets her. She stops.* MRS. CASSILIS *kisses her affectionately.*]

MRS. CASSILIS. Going out, Ethel dear? Good morning. [*Greets* MRS. BORRIDGE.

ETHEL. Good morning.

MRS. CASSILIS [*putting her arm in* ETHEL'S *and leading her up to window*]. Isn't it a lovely day? I woke at five. I believe it was the birds singing under my window.

ETHEL. Did you, Mrs. Cassilis?

Enter LADY MARCHMONT.

LADY MARCHMONT. Good morning, Adelaide. [*Kisses her.*] Late again, I'm afraid.

[*Shakes hands with* ETHEL.

MRS. CASSILIS [*sweetly*]. Another of your headaches, dear? I'm so sorry.

LADY MARCHMONT [*ignoring the rebuke*]. Good morning, Mrs. Borridge. I hope *you* slept well.

MRS. BORRIDGE. Sound as a bell. But, then, I was always a oner to sleep. My old man, when 'e was alive, used to say 'e never knew anyone sleep like me. And snore ! Why 'e declared it kep' 'im awake 'alf the night. But *I* never noticed it.

LADY MARCHMONT [*sweetly*]. That must have been a great consolation for Mr. Borridge.

MRS. BORRIDGE. Your 'usband snore ?

LADY MARCHMONT [*laughing*]. No.

MRS. BORRIDGE. Thinks it's low per'aps. . . . They used to say snorin' comes from sleepin' with your mouth open, but *I* don't know. What do *you* think ?

LADY MARCHMONT. I really don't know, dear Mrs. Borridge. I must think it over.

[LADY MARCHMONT *takes chair by* MRS. BORRIDGE. *They converse in dumb show.* ETHEL *and* MRS. CASSILIS *come down stage.*]

MRS. CASSILIS. What a pretty blouse you've got on to-day, dear.

ETHEL. Is it, Mrs. Cassilis ?

MRS. CASSILIS. Sweetly pretty. It goes so well with your eyes. You've lovely eyes, you know.

ETHEL. Do you think so ?

MRS. CASSILIS. Of course. So does Geoff.

ETHEL [*disengaging herself*]. Oh, Geoff—— Well, I must go upstairs. [*To* MRS. BORRIDGE *in passing.*] Don't forget, mummy.

Exit ETHEL.

MRS. BORRIDGE. What, dearie ? Oh yes. Ethel says we must be packin' our traps, Mrs. Cassilis.

MRS. CASSILIS [*startled*]. Packing ?

MRS. BORRIDGE. Yes. She says we mustn't outstay our welcome. She's proud, is my girlie.

MRS. CASSILIS [*with extreme cordiality*]. But you're not thinking of leaving us? Oh, you mustn't do that. Geoff would be so disappointed. And so should I.

MRS. BORRIDGE. I don't *want* to go, I'm sure. Only Ethel said——

MRS. CASSILIS. There must be some mistake. I counted on you for quite a long visit.

MRS. BORRIDGE. Ethel said we were only asked for a week.

MRS. CASSILIS. But that was before I really knew you, wasn't it? It's quite different now.

MRS. BORRIDGE [*purring delightedly*]. If you feel that, Mrs. Cassilis——

MRS. CASSILIS. Of course I feel it. I hope you'll stay quite a *long* time yet.

MRS. BORRIDGE [*complacent, appealing to* LADY MARCHMONT, *who nods sympathy*]. There! I told Ethel how it was.

MRS. CASSILIS [*anxious*]. Ethel doesn't *want* to go, does she?

MRS. BORRIDGE. Oh *no*. She'd be delighted to stop on. Only she thought——

MRS. CASSILIS [*determined to leave* MRS. BORRIDGE *no opportunity to hedge*]. Very well, then. That's settled. You'll stay with us till Geoff and I go to Scotland. That won't be till the middle of August. You promise?

MRS. BORRIDGE. Thank you, Mrs. Cassilis. I call that *real* hospitable! [*Rising.*] And now I'll run upstairs and tell my girl, or she'll be packing my black satin before I've time to stop her. She's so 'asty. And I always say nothing spoils things like packing, especially satins. They do crush so.

[MRS. BORRIDGE *waddles out. As soon as the door closes* MRS. CASSILIS *heaves a deep sigh of relief, showing how alarmed she had been lest the* BORRIDGES *should really take their departure. For a moment there is silence. Then* LADY

MARCHMONT, *who has watched this scene with full appreciation of its ironic humour, speaks.*]

LADY MARCHMONT. How you fool that old woman!

MRS. CASSILIS. So do *you*, dear.

LADY MARCHMONT. Yes. You'll make me as great a hypocrite as yourself before you're done. When you first began I was shocked at you. But now I feel a dreadful spirit of emulation stealing over me.

MRS. CASSILIS [*grimly*]. There's always a satisfaction in doing a thing well, isn't there?

LADY MARCHMONT. You must feel it, then.

MRS. CASSILIS. Thanks.

LADY MARCHMONT [*puzzled*]. Do you really want these dreadful people to stay all that time?

MRS. CASSILIS. Certainly. And to come back, if necessary, in October.

LADY MARCHMONT. Good heavens! Why?

MRS. CASSILIS [*sitting*]. My dear Margaret, as long as that woman and her daughter are here we *may* get Geoffrey out of their clutches. I thought we should manage it last night. Last night was a terrible disillusionment for him, poor boy. But I was wrong. It was too soon.

LADY MARCHMONT. By the way, what did that amusing wretch Major Warrington advise?

MRS. CASSILIS. I didn't consult him. I'd no opportunity. Besides, I couldn't have trusted him. He might have gone over to the enemy.

LADY MARCHMONT. Yes. He was evidently attracted to the girl.

MRS. CASSILIS. I suppose so. Major Warrington isn't fastidious where women are concerned.

LADY MARCHMONT. Still, he knew, of course.

MRS. CASSILIS. Only what Lady Remenham would have told him. However, his visit wasn't altogether wasted, I think.

LADY MARCHMONT. That song, you mean?

MRS. CASSILIS. Yes. He gave poor Ethel a glimpse of the Paradise she is turning her back on for ever. London, music-hall songs, rackety bachelors. And that made her reckless. The contrast between Major Warrington and, say, our dear Rector, can hardly fail to have gone home to her.

[*Further conversation is interrupted by the entrance of* ETHEL, *in the worst of tempers.* MRS. CASSILIS *is on her guard at once.*]

ETHEL [*bursting out*]. Mrs. Cassilis——

MRS. CASSILIS [*very sweetly, rising and going to her*]. Ethel dear, what *is* this I hear? You're not going to run away from us?

ETHEL [*doggedly*]. Indeed we must, Mrs. Cassilis. You've had us for a week. We really mustn't stay any longer.

MRS. CASSILIS. But, my dear, it's *delightful* to have you.

MRS. BORRIDGE [*who has followed hard after her daughter and now enters, flushed and rather breathless*]. There, you see, dearie! What did I tell you?

MRS. CASSILIS. Geoff would be *terribly* distressed if you went away. He'd think I hadn't made you comfortable. He'd scold me dreadfully.

ETHEL. I don't think Geoff will care.

[MRS. BORRIDGE *appeals mutely for sympathy to* LADY MARCHMONT, *who hastens to give it in full measure.*]

MRS. CASSILIS [*great solicitude*]. My dear, you've not had any little difference with Geoff? Any quarrel?

ETHEL. No.

MRS. CASSILIS. I was so afraid——

ETHEL. Still, we oughtn't to plant ourselves on you in this way.

MRS. BORRIDGE. Plant ourselves ! Really, dearie, how can you say such things ? Plant ourselves !

ETHEL. Oh, do be quiet, mother. [*Stamps her foot.*

MRS. CASSILIS [*soothing her*]. Anyhow, you can't possibly go to-day. The carriage has gone to Branscombe, and the other horse has cast a shoe. And to-morrow there's a dinner-party at Milverton. You'll stay for *that ?*

ETHEL. You're very kind, Mrs. Cassilis, but——

MRS. CASSILIS [*leaving her no time to withdraw*]. That's right, my dear. You'll stay. And next week we'll have some young people over to meet you, and you shall dance all the evening.

MRS. BORRIDGE. There, Ethel ?

ETHEL [*hopeless*]. Very well. If you really wish it.

MRS. CASSILIS. Of course I wish it. I'm *so* glad. I shan't be able to part with you for a *long* time yet.

[*Kisses her tenderly. But* ETHEL *seems too depressed to answer to these blandishments.*]

LADY MARCHMONT [*under her breath*]. Really, Adelaide !

MRS. CASSILIS [*sweetly*]. Into the garden, did you say, Margaret ? [*Taking her up towards window.*] Very well. The sun *is* tempting, isn't it ?

[MRS. CASSILIS *and her sister sail out.* ETHEL *and her mother remain, the former in a condition of frantic exasperation.*]

ETHEL. Well, mother, you've done it !

MRS. BORRIDGE [*snapping. She feels she is being goaded unduly*]. Done what, dearie ?

ETHEL [*impatiently*]. Oh, you know.

MRS. BORRIDGE. Do you mean about staying on here ? But what could I do ? Mrs. Cassilis wouldn't *let* us go. You saw that yourself.

ETHEL. You might have stood out.

MRS. BORRIDGE. I did, dearie. I stood out as long as

ever I could. But she wouldn't hear of our goin'. You saw that yourself.

ETHEL. Well, mother, don't say I didn't warn you, that's all.

MRS. BORRIDGE. Warn me, dearie?

ETHEL [*breaking out*]. That I was tired of this place. Sick and tired of it! That it was time we were moving.

MRS. BORRIDGE [*placidly*]. Is that all? I'll remember. [*Pause.*] How far did you get with the packing?

ETHEL [*impatiently*]. I don't know.

MRS. BORRIDGE. You hadn't packed my black satin?

ETHEL. I don't know. Yes, I think so. I'm not sure. Don't *worry*, mother.

MRS. BORRIDGE [*lamentably*]. It'll be simply covered with creases. I know it will. Run up at once, there's a good girl, and shake it out.

ETHEL [*snaps*]. Oh, bother!

MRS. BORRIDGE. Then I must. How tiresome girls are! Always in the tantrums!

[*Poor old* MRS. BORRIDGE *ambles out grumbling.* ETHEL, *left alone, sits scowling furiously at the carpet and biting her nails. There is a considerable pause, during which her rage and weariness are silently expressed. Then* GEOFFREY *and* MABEL *enter, quite cheerful, in riding things. They make a curious contrast to the almost tragic figure of sulkiness which meets their eyes.*]

GEOFFREY [*cheerfully*]. Hullo, Ethel! There you are, are you?

ETHEL [*sulky*]. You can see me, I suppose.

MABEL. We didn't get our ride after all.

ETHEL. Didn't you? [*Turns away.*

MABEL. No. Basil has strained one of his sinews, poor darling. He'll have to lie up for a day or two.

GEOFFREY. Isn't it hard luck? It would have been

such a glorious day for a ride. We were going round by Long Winton and up to Tenterden's farm and——

ETHEL [*snaps*]. You needn't trouble to tell me. I don't want to hear.

[*There is an awkward pause after this explosion.*

MABEL. I think I'll go up and change my habit, Geoff.

[GEOFFREY *nods, and* MABEL *goes out.* GEOFFREY *after a moment goes up to* ETHEL, *and lays a hand gently on her shoulder.*]

GEOFFREY. What is it, Ethel? Is anything the matter?

ETHEL [*shaking him off fiercely*]. Please don't touch me.

GEOFFREY. Something has happened. What is it?

ETHEL [*savagely*]. Nothing's happened. Nothing ever does happen *here.*

[GEOFFREY *tries to take her hand. She pulls it pettishly away. He slightly shrugs his shoulders. A long pause. He rises slowly and turns towards door.*]

ETHEL [*stopping him*]. Geoff!

GEOFFREY. Yes. [*Does not turn his head.*

ETHEL. I want to break off our engagement.

GEOFFREY [*swinging round, astonished, and not for a moment taking her seriously*]. My dear girl!

ETHEL. I think it would be better. Better for both of us.

GEOFFREY [*still rallying her*]. Might one ask why?

ETHEL. For many reasons. Oh, don't let us go into all that. Just say you release me and there's an end.

GEOFFREY [*more serious*]. My dear Ethel. What *is* the matter? Aren't you well?

ETHEL [*impatiently*]. I'm perfectly well.

GEOFFREY. I don't think you are. You look quite flushed. I wish you'd take more exercise. You'd be ever so much better.

ETHEL [*goaded to frenzy by this well-meant suggestion,* GEOFFREY'S *panacea for all human ills*]. Geoffrey, you're simply maddening. Do please understand that I know when I'm well and when I'm ill. There's nothing whatever the matter with me. I believe you think everything in life would go right if only every one took a cold bath every morning and spent the rest of the day shooting partridges.

GEOFFREY [*quite simply*]. Well, there's a lot in that, isn't there?

ETHEL. Rubbish!

GEOFFREY [*struck by a brilliant idea*]. It's not that silly business about the riding again, is it?

ETHEL [*almost hysterical with exasperation*]. Oh, no! no! *Please* believe that I'm not a child, and that I know what I'm saying. *I want to break off our engagement.* I don't think we're suited to each other.

GEOFFREY [*piqued*]. This is rather sudden, isn't it?

ETHEL [*sharply*]. How do you know it's sudden?

GEOFFREY. But isn't it?

ETHEL. *No.* It's not.

GEOFFREY [*struck by a thought*]. Ethel, has my mother ——?

ETHEL. Your mother has nothing whatever to do with it.

GEOFFREY. She hasn't said anything?

ETHEL. Your mother has been everything that's kind and good. In fact, if it hadn't been for her I think I should have broken it off before. But I didn't want to hurt her.

[GEOFFREY *rises, and paces the room up and down for a moment in thought. Then he turns to her again.*]

GEOFFREY. Ethel, you mustn't come to a decision like this hastily. You must take time to consider.

ETHEL. Thank you. My mind is quite made up.

GEOFFREY. Still, you might think it over for a day or

two—a week, perhaps. It [*hesitates*] . . . it wouldn't be fair of me to take you at your word in this way.

ETHEL. Why not?

GEOFFREY [*hesitates*]. You might—regret it afterwards.

ETHEL [*with a short laugh*]. You're very modest.

GEOFFREY [*nettled*]. Oh, I'm not vain enough to imagine that you would find anything to regret in *me*. *I'm* a commonplace fellow enough. But there are other things which a girl has to consider in marriage, aren't there? Position. Money. If you broke off our engagement now, mightn't you regret these later on [*slight touch of bitterness*], however little you regret *me?*

ETHEL [*touched*]. Geoff dear, I'm sorry I hurt you. I didn't mean to. You're a good fellow. Far too good for me. And I know you mean it kindly when you ask me to take time, and all that. But my mind's quite made up. Don't let's say any more about it.

GEOFFREY [*slowly, and a little sadly*]. You don't love me any more, then?

ETHEL. No. [*Decisively.*] I don't love you any more. Perhaps I never did love you really, Geoff. I don't know.

GEOFFREY. I loved *you*, Ethel.

ETHEL. I wonder.

GEOFFREY. You know I did.

ETHEL. You thought you did. But that's not always the same thing, is it? Many a girl takes a man's fancy for a moment. Yet people say one only loves once, don't they?

[*Pause.*

GEOFFREY [*hesitating again*]. Ethel . . . I don't know how to say it. . . . You'll laugh at me again. . . . But . . . you're sure you're not doing this on *my* account?

ETHEL. On *your* account?

GEOFFREY. Yes. To spare me. Because you think I ought to marry in my own class, as Lady Remenham would say?

ETHEL. No.

GEOFFREY. Quite sure?

ETHEL [*nods*]. Quite. [*Turns away.*

GEOFFREY [*frankly puzzled*]. Then I *can't* understand it!

ETHEL [*turning on him impatiently*]. My dear Geoff, is it impossible for you to understand that I don't *want* to marry you? That if I married you I should be bored to death? That I *loathe* the life down here among your highly respectable friends? That if I had to *live* here with you I should yawn myself into my grave in six months?

GEOFFREY [*astonished*]. Don't you *like* Deynham?

ETHEL. No. I *detest* it. Oh, it's pretty enough, I suppose, and the fields are very green, and the view from Milverton Hill is much admired. And you live all alone in a great park, and you've horses and dogs, and a butler and two footmen. But that's not enough for *me*. I want life, people, *lots* of people. If I lived down here I should go blue-mouldy in three weeks. I'm town-bred, a true cockney. I want streets and shops and gas lamps. I don't want your carriages and pair. Give me a penny omnibus.

GEOFFREY. Ethel!

ETHEL. Now you're shocked. It *is* vulgar, isn't it? But *I'm* vulgar. And I'm not ashamed of it. Now you know.

[*Another pause.* GEOFFREY, *in pained surprise, ponders deeply. At last he speaks.*]

GEOFFREY. It's all over, then?

ETHEL [*nodding flippantly*]. All over and done with. I surrender my claim to everything, the half of your worldly goods, of your mother's worldly goods, of your house, your park, your men-servants and maid-servants, your aristocratic relations. Don't let's forget your aristocratic relations. I surrender them all. There's my hand on it.

[*Stretches it out.*

GEOFFREY [*pained*]. Don't, Ethel.

ETHEL [*with genuine surprise*]. My dear Geoff, you don't mean to say you're *sorry!* You ought to be flinging your cap in the air at regaining your liberty. Why, I believe there are tears in your eyes! Actually tears! Let me look. [*Turns his face to her.*

GEOFFREY [*pulling it away sulkily*]. You don't suppose a fellow *likes* being thrown over like this, do you?

ETHEL. Vanity, my dear Geoff. Mere vanity.

GEOFFREY [*hotly*]. It's *not!*

ETHEL [*suddenly serious*]. Geoff, do you *want* our engagement to go on? Do you *want* to marry me still? [*He turns to her impulsively.*] Do you *love* me still? [*Checks him.*] No, Geoff. Think before you speak. On your honour! [GEOFFREY *is silent.*] There, you see! Come, dear, cheer up. It's best as it is. Give me a kiss. The last one. [*She goes to* GEOFFREY *and holds up her face to be kissed. He kisses her on the forehead.*] And now I'll run upstairs and tell mother. [*Laughs.*] Poor mother! Won't she make a shine!

[ETHEL *goes out recklessly.* GEOFFREY, *left alone, looks round the room in a dazed way. Takes out cigarette-case automatically, goes to writing-table for match. Just as he is lighting cigarette* MRS. CASSILIS *enters from garden, followed a moment later by* LADY MARCHMONT. *He throws cigarette away unlighted.*]

MRS. CASSILIS. All alone, Geoffrey?

GEOFFREY. Yes, mother.

MRS. CASSILIS. Where's Ethel!

GEOFFREY. Mother — Ethel's . . . [*Sees* LADY MARCHMONT. *Pause.*] Good morning, Aunt Margaret.

LADY MARCHMONT. Good morning.

MRS. CASSILIS. Well, dear?

GEOFFREY. Mother [*plunging into his subject*], a terrible thing has happened. Ethel was here a moment ago, and she has broken off our engagement.

LADY MARCHMONT. Broken it off!

MRS. CASSILIS [*immensely sympathetic*]. Broken it off, dear? Surely not?

GEOFFREY. Yes.

MRS. CASSILIS. Oh, *poor* Geoffrey. [*Going to him.*] Did she say why?

GEOFFREY [*dully*]. Only that it had all been a mistake. She was tired of it all, and didn't like the country, and—that's all, I think.

MRS. CASSILIS [*anxious*]. My poor boy. And I thought her so happy with us. [*Laying hand caressingly on his shoulder as he sits with head bowed.*] You don't think we've been to blame—*I've* been to blame—in any way, do you? Perhaps we ought to have amused her more.

GEOFFREY. Not you, mother. You've always been sweet and good to her. Always. She said so.

MRS. CASSILIS. I'm glad of that, dear.

Enter MRS. BORRIDGE, *furiously angry, followed by* ETHEL, *vainly trying to detain or silence her.* GEOFFREY *retreats up stage, where* MRS. BORRIDGE *for a moment does not notice him.*

MRS. BORRIDGE [*raging*]. Where's Geoff? Leave me alone, Ethel. Where's Geoff?

ETHEL. He's not here, mother. And Mrs. Cassilis is. Do be quiet.

GEOFFREY [*coming between them*]. I'm here. What is it, Mrs. Borridge?

MRS. BORRIDGE. Oh, Geoffy, what *is* this Ethel's been telling me? You haven't reely broke off your engagement, have you?

ETHEL. Nonsense, mother. *I* broke it off, as I told you.

MRS. BORRIDGE. But you didn't mean it, dearie. It's all a mistake. Just a little tiff.

ETHEL [*firmly*]. No!

MRS. BORRIDGE [*obstinately*]. Yes, it is. It'll blow over. You wouldn't be so unkind to poor Geoffy.

ETHEL. Mother, don't be a fool. It doesn't take anybody in. Come upstairs and let's get on with our packing.

MRS. BORRIDGE [*stamps foot*]. Be quiet, Ethel, when I tell you. Lady Marchmont, won't *you* speak to her? Undutiful girl. I should like to *whip* her!

[ETHEL *turns away in despair.*]

LADY MARCHMONT [*soothingly*]. Ah, well, dear Mrs. Borridge, perhaps young people know best about these things.

MRS. BORRIDGE [*excited and angry*]. Know best! know best! How should they know best? They don't know *anything*. They're as ignorant as they are uppish. [*Growing tearful.*] And to think 'ow I've worked for that girl! 'Ow I've slaved for 'er, denied myself for 'er. [*Breaking down.*] I did so want 'er to be respectable. I 'aven't always been respectable myself, and I know the value of it.

[*Subsides into chair, almost hysterical, and no longer realising what she is saying.*]

ETHEL. Oh, hush, mother!

MRS. BORRIDGE [*angry again*]. I won't 'ush, so there! I'm your mother, and I won't be trod on. *I* find some one to marry you—a better match than ever you'll find for yourself, miss—and this is 'ow I'm treated!

[*Begins to cry.*

ETHEL [*taking her arm*]. Mother, mother, do come away.

MRS. BORRIDGE [*breaking down altogether*]. And now to 'ave to begin all over again. And young men ain't so green as they used to be. Not by a long way. They're cunning most of them. They take a deal of catchin'. And I'm gettin' an old woman. Oh, she might 'ave spared me this.

MRS. CASSILIS [*almost sorry for her*]. Mrs. Borridge—Mrs. Borridge.

MRS. BORRIDGE [*refusing to be comforted*]. But she's no natural affection. That's what it is. She doesn't love 'er mother. She's 'eadstrong and wilful, and never paid the least attention to what I told 'er. [*Burst of tears.*] But I do think she might 'ave let *'im* break it off. Then there'd 'ave been a breach of promise, and that's always something. That's what I always say to girls : " Leave *them* to break it off, dearies. And then there'll be a breach of promise, *and* damages." That's if you've got something on paper. But [*fresh burst of tears*] she never *would* get anything on paper. She never paid the least regard to her old mother. She's an undutiful girl, and that's 'ow it is.

[*Goes off into incoherent sobs.*

BUTLER. Lady Remenham.

MRS. CASSILIS [*rising hastily*]. The drawing-room, Watson.

[*She is, however, too late to stop* WATSON *from showing in* LADY REMENHAM.]

LADY REMENHAM [*sailing in, with breezy cheerfulness*]. How do you do, Adelaide ? How do you do, Margaret ? I've just driven Algernon to the station, and I thought I'd leave this for you as I passed. [*Gives book.*

MRS. BORRIDGE. She's an undutiful daughter. That's what she is. [*Snorting and sobbing.*

LADY REMENHAM [*perceiving for the first time that something unusual is going on*]. Eh ?

MRS. CASSILIS. Mrs. Borridge is not quite herself just now. Dear Ethel has decided that she does not wish to continue her engagement to my son, and Mrs. Borridge has only just heard the news.

LADY REMENHAM [*scarcely able to believe her ears*]. Not wish—— !

MRS. CASSILIS [*hastily, checking her*]. No. This has naturally upset us all very much. It was so very sudden.

LADY REMENHAM. Well, I must say——

[*Luckily she does not do so, but takes refuge in silence.*

MRS. BORRIDGE [*burst of grief*]. Oh, why didn't she get something on paper? Letters is best. Men are that slippy! I always told her to get something on paper.

[*Breaks down completely.*

ETHEL. Come away, mother. [*Takes her firmly by the arm.*] Will you please order the carriage, Mrs. Cassilis?

[*Leads* MRS. BORRIDGE *off, sobbing and gulping to the last.*

LADY REMENHAM [*sitting down, with a triumphant expression on her amiable countenance*]. Geoffrey, will you tell the coachman to drive round to the stables! *I* shall stay to luncheon.

[*It is impossible adequately to represent the tone in which* LADY REMENHAM *announces this intention. It is that of a victorious general occupying the field, from which he has beaten the enemy with bag and baggage. Luckily,* GEOFFREY *is too depressed to notice anything. He goes out without a word—and the curtain falls.*]

THE LAST OF THE DE MULLINS

(1907)

"βέλτισθ' ὑγιαίνειν"

CHARACTERS

Hugo De Mullin.
Jane De Mullin, *his wife.*
Mrs. Clouston, *his sister.*
Janet De Mullin (*Mrs. Seagrave*), *Hugo's eldest daughter.*
Johnny Seagrave, *her son.*
Hester De Mullin, *her sister.*
Bertha Aldenham.
Monty Bulstead.
Dr. Rolt, *the local doctor.*
Mr. Brown, *the curate.*
Miss Deanes.
Ellen, *maid at the De Mullins'.*

The action of the play takes place at Brendon Underwood in Dorset, Acts I and III at the Manor House, the De Mullins' house in the village, Act II on the borders of Brendon Forest. Three days pass between Acts I and II, five between Acts II and III.

THE LAST OF THE DE MULLINS

ACT I

SCENE.—*The Inner Hall at the Manor House in Brendon-Underwood village. An old-fashioned, white-panelled room. At the back is a big stone-mullioned Tudor window looking out on to the garden. On the left of this is a bay in which is a smaller window. A door in the bay leads out into the garden. People entering by this door pass the window before they appear. The furniture is oak, mostly Jacobean or older. The right-hand wall of the room is mainly occupied by a great Tudor fire-place, over which the De Mullin coat-of-arms is carved in stone. Above this a door leads to the outer hall and front door. A door on the opposite side of the room leads to the staircase and the rest of the house. The walls are hung with a long succession of family portraits of all periods and in all stages of dinginess as to both canvas and frame. When the curtain rises the stage is empty. Then* HESTER *is seen to pass the window at the back, followed by* MR. BROWN. *A moment later they enter.* MR. BROWN *is a stout, rather unwholesome-looking curate,* HESTER *a lean, angular girl of twenty-eight, very plainly and unattractively dressed in sombre tight-fitting clothes. She has a cape over her shoulders and a black hat on.* BROWN *wears seedy clerical garments, huge boots and a squashy hat. The time is twelve o'clock in the morning of a fine day in September.*

HESTER. Come in, Mr. Brown. I'll tell mother you're here. I expect she's upstairs with father.

[*Going towards door.*

BROWN. Don't disturb Mrs. De Mullin, please. I didn't mean to come in.

HESTER. You'll sit down now you *are* here?

BROWN. Thank you. [*Does so awkwardly.*] I'm so glad to hear Mr. De Mullin is better. The Vicar will be glad too.

HESTER. Yes. Dr. Rolt thinks he will do all right now.

BROWN. You must have been very anxious when he was first taken ill.

HESTER. We were terribly anxious.

[HESTER *takes off her hat and cape and puts them down on the window seat.*]

BROWN. I suppose there's no doubt it was some sort of stroke?

HESTER. Dr. Rolt says no doubt.

BROWN. How did it happen?

HESTER. We don't know. He had just gone out of the room when we heard a fall. Mother ran out into the hall and found him lying by the door quite unconscious. She was dreadfully frightened. So were we all.

BROWN. Had he been complaining of feeling unwell?

HESTER. Not specially. He complained of the heat a little. And he had a headache. But father's not strong, you know. None of the De Mullins are, Aunt Harriet says.

BROWN. Mrs. Clouston is with you now, isn't she?

HESTER. Yes. For a month. She generally stays with us for a month in the summer.

BROWN. I suppose she's very fond of Brendon?

HESTER. All the De Mullins are fond of Brendon, Mr. Brown.

BROWN. Naturally. You have been here so long.

HESTER. Since the time of King Stephen.

BROWN. Not in this house?

HESTER [*smiling*]. Not in this house, of course. It's not old enough for that.

BROWN. Still, it must be very old. The oldest house in the village, isn't it?

HESTER. Only about four hundred years. The date is 1603. The mill is older, of course.

BROWN. You still own the mill, don't you?

HESTER. Yes. Father would never part with it. He thinks everything of the mill. We get our name from it, you know. De Mullin. Du Moulin. "Of the Mill."

BROWN. Were the original De Mullins millers then?

HESTER [*rather shocked at such a suggestion*]. Oh no!

BROWN. I thought they couldn't have been.

HESTER. No De Mullin has ever been in trade of *any* kind! But in the old days to own a mill was a feudal privilege. Only lords of manors and the great abbeys had them. The farmers had to bring all their corn to them to be ground.

BROWN. I see.

HESTER. There were constant disputes about it all through the Middle Ages.

BROWN. Why was that?

HESTER. The farmers would rather have ground their corn for themselves, I suppose.

BROWN. Why? If the De Mullins were willing to do it for them?

HESTER. They had to pay for having it ground, of course.

BROWN [*venturing on a small joke*]. Then the De Mullins *were* millers, after all, in a sense.

HESTER. You mustn't let father hear you say so!

BROWN. The mill is never used now, is it?

HESTER. No. When people gave up growing corn round here and all the land was turned into pasture it fell into decay, and now it's almost ruinous.

BROWN. What a pity!

HESTER. Yes. Father says England has never been the same since the repeal of the Corn Laws. [*Enter* MRS. DE MULLIN *and* MRS. CLOUSTON *by the door on the left, followed by* DR. ROLT.] Here is mother—and Aunt Harriet.

[MRS. DE MULLIN, *poor lady, is a crushed, timid creature of fifty-eight or so, entirely dominated by the* DE MULLIN *fetish and quite unable to hold her own against either her husband or her sister-in-law, a hard-mouthed, resolute woman of sixty. Even* HESTER *she finds almost too much for her. For the rest a gentle, kindly lady, rather charming in her extreme helplessness.* ROLT *is the average country doctor, brisk, sensible, neither a fool nor a genius.*]

ROLT [*as they enter the room*]. He's better. Distinctly better. A little weak and depressed of course. That's only to be expected. Good morning.

[*Shakes hands with* HESTER. *Nods to* BROWN.

MRS. DE MULLIN. Mr. De Mullin is always nervous about himself.

ROLT. Yes. Constitutional, no doubt. But he'll pick up in a few days. Keep him as quiet as you can. That's really all he needs now.

MRS. DE MULLIN. You don't think he ought to stay in his room? . . . Good morning, Mr. Brown. Are you waiting to see me?

[BROWN *shakes hands with both ladies.*

BROWN [*awkwardly*]. Not specially. I walked over from the church with Miss De Mullin.

HESTER. Is father coming downstairs, mother?

MRS. DE MULLIN. Yes, Hester. He insisted on getting up. You know he always hates staying in his room.

HESTER. Oh, Dr. Rolt, do you think he *should*?

ROLT. I don't think it will do him any harm. He

can rest quietly in a chair or on the sofa. . . . Well, I must be off. Good-bye, Mrs. De Mullin.

[*Shakes hands briskly with every one.*

BROWN [*rising ponderously*]. I must be going too. [*Shakes hands with* MRS. DE MULLIN.] You'll tell Mr. De Mullin I inquired after him? Good-bye, Mrs. Clouston. [*Shakes hands.*] And you're coming to help with the Harvest Decorations on Saturday, aren't you, Miss De Mullin?

HESTER [*shaking hands*]. Of course.

[BROWN *and* ROLT *go out.*]

MRS. CLOUSTON [*seating herself and beginning to knit resolutely*]. What singularly unattractive curates the Vicar seems to get hold of, Jane!

MRS. DE MULLIN [*meekly*]. Do you think so, Harriet?

MRS. CLOUSTON. Quite remarkably. This Mr. Brown, for instance. He has the most enormous *feet*! And his boots! I've never seen such boots!

HESTER [*flushing*]. We needn't sneer if Mr. Brown doesn't wear fine clothes, Aunt Harriet.

MRS. CLOUSTON. Of course not, Hester. Still, I think he goes to the opposite extreme. And he really is quite abnormally plain. Then there was that Mr. Snood, who was curate when I was down last year. The man with the very red hands. [*These acid comments are too much for* HESTER, *who flounces out angrily.* MRS. CLOUSTON *looks up for a moment, wondering what is the meaning of this sudden disappearance. Then continues unmoved.*] I'm afraid the clergy aren't what they were in *our* young days, Jane.

MRS. DE MULLIN. I don't think I've noticed any falling off.

MRS. CLOUSTON. It is there all the same. I'm sure Hugo would agree with me. Of course, curates are paid next to nothing. Still, I think the Vicar might be more happy in his choice.

MRS. DE MULLIN. I believe the poor like him.

MRS. CLOUSTON [*to whom this seems of small importance compared with his shocking social disabilities*]. Very likely. . . . Do please keep still, Jane, and don't fidget with that book. What *is* the matter with you?

MRS. DE MULLIN. I'm a little nervous this morning. Hugo's illness . . .

MRS. CLOUSTON. Hugo's almost well now.

MRS. DE MULLIN. Still the anxiety . . .

MRS. CLOUSTON. Nonsense, Jane. Anxiety is not at all a thing to give way to, especially when there's no longer anything to be anxious about. Hugo's practically well now. Dr. Rolt seems to have frightened us all quite unnecessarily.

MRS. DE MULLIN. I suppose it's difficult to tell.

MRS. CLOUSTON. Of course it's difficult. Otherwise no one would send for a doctor. What are doctors for if they can't tell when a case is serious and when it is not?

MRS. DE MULLIN. But if he didn't know?

MRS. CLOUSTON. Then he *ought* to have known. Next time Hugo is ill you'd better send to Bridport.

[MRS. DE MULLIN *drops book on table with a clatter.*]

Really, Jane, what *are* you doing? Throwing books about like that!

MRS. DE MULLIN. It slipped out of my hand.

[*Rises and goes up to window restlessly.*

MRS. CLOUSTON. Is anything wrong?

MRS. DE MULLIN [*hesitating*]. Well, the truth is I've done something, Harriet, and now I'm not sure whether I ought to have done it.

MRS. CLOUSTON. Done what?

MRS. DE MULLIN [*dolorously*]. I'm afraid you won't approve.

MRS. CLOUSTON. Perhaps you'd better tell me what it is. Then we shall know.

MRS. DE MULLIN. The fact is some one is coming here this morning, Harriet—to see Hugo.

MRS. CLOUSTON. To see Hugo? Who is it?

MRS. DE MULLIN. Janet.

MRS. CLOUSTON [*with horror*]. Janet?

MRS. DE MULLIN. Yes.

MRS. CLOUSTON. Janet! She wouldn't *dare*!

MRS. DE MULLIN [*dolorously*]. I sent for her, Harriet.

MRS. CLOUSTON. You *sent* for her?

MRS. DE MULLIN. Yes. When Hugo was first taken ill and Dr. Rolt seemed to think the attack was so serious . . . .

MRS. CLOUSTON. Dr. Rolt was a fool.

MRS. DE MULLIN. Very likely, Harriet. But he said Hugo might die. And he said if there was anyone Hugo would wish to see . . .

MRS. CLOUSTON. But would Hugo wish to see Janet?

MRS. DE MULLIN. I thought he might. After all Janet *is* his daughter.

MRS. CLOUSTON. I thought he said he would never see her again?

MRS. DE MULLIN. He did *say* that, of course. But that was eight years ago. And, of course, he wasn't ill then.

MRS. CLOUSTON. When did you send for her?

MRS. DE MULLIN. Three days ago.

MRS. CLOUSTON. Why didn't she come *then*, if she was coming at all?

MRS. DE MULLIN. She was away from home. That was so unfortunate. If she had come when Hugo was ill in bed it might have been all right. But now that he's almost well again . . .

MRS. CLOUSTON. When did you hear she was coming?

MRS. DE MULLIN. Only this morning. Here is what she says. [*Produces telegram from pocket.*

MRS. CLOUSTON [*reads*]. "Telegram delayed. Arrive midday. Seagrave." Seagrave?

MRS. DE MULLIN. Yes. She calls herself Mrs. Seagrave now.

MRS. CLOUSTON [*nods*]. On account of the child, I suppose.

MRS. DE MULLIN. I suppose so.

MRS. CLOUSTON. I never could understand how Janet came to go so wrong. [MRS. DE MULLIN *sighs.*] None of the *De Mullins* have ever done such a thing before.

MRS. DE MULLIN [*plaintively*]. I'm sure she doesn't get it from *my* family.

MRS. CLOUSTON. Well, she must have got it from *somewhere.* She's not in the least like a De Mullin.

MRS. DE MULLIN [*lamentably*]. I believe it was all through bicycling.

MRS. CLOUSTON. Bicycling ?

MRS. DE MULLIN. Yes. When girls usen't to scour about the country as they do now these things didn't happen.

MRS. CLOUSTON [*severely*]. *I* never approved of Janet's bicycling, you remember, Jane.

MRS. DE MULLIN. Nor did I, Harriet. But it was no use. Janet only laughed. Janet never would do what she was told about things even when she was quite a child. She was so very obstinate. She was always getting some idea or other into her head. And when she did nothing would prevent her from carrying it out. At one time she wanted to *teach.*

MRS. CLOUSTON. I remember.

MRS. DE MULLIN. She said girls ought to go out and earn their own living like boys.

MRS. CLOUSTON. What nonsense !

MRS. DE MULLIN. So Hugo said. But Janet wouldn't listen. Finally we had to let her go over and teach the Aldenham girls French three times a week, just to keep her amused.

MRS. CLOUSTON [*thoughtfully*]. It was strange you never could find out who the father was.

MRS. DE MULLIN [*sighs*]. Yes. She wouldn't tell us.

MRS. CLOUSTON. You should have made her tell you. Hugo should have insisted on it.

MRS. DE MULLIN. Hugo did insist. He was terribly angry with her. He sent her to her room and said she was not to come down till she told us. But it was no use. Janet just stayed in her room till we had all gone to bed and then took the train to London.

MRS. CLOUSTON. You should have locked her door.

MRS. DE MULLIN. We did. She got out of the window.

MRS. CLOUSTON. Got out of the window! The girl might have been killed.

MRS. DE MULLIN. Yes. But Janet was always fond of climbing. And she was never afraid of anything.

MRS. CLOUSTON. But there's no late train to London.

MRS. DE MULLIN. She caught the mail at Weymouth, I suppose.

MRS. CLOUSTON. Do you mean to say she *walked* all the way to Weymouth in the middle of the night? Why, it's twelve miles.

MRS. DE MULLIN. She had her bicycle, as I said.

MRS. CLOUSTON. Tck! . . . How did you know she went to London?

MRS. DE MULLIN. She wrote from there for her things.

MRS. CLOUSTON. I wonder she wasn't ashamed.

MRS. DE MULLIN. So Hugo said. However, he said I might send them. But he made me send a letter with the things to say that he would have nothing more to do with her and that she was not to write again. For a time she didn't write. Nearly five months. Then, when her baby was born, she wrote to tell me. That was how I knew she had taken the name of Seagrave. She mentioned it.

MRS. CLOUSTON. Did you show the letter to Hugo?

MRS. DE MULLIN. Yes.

MRS. CLOUSTON. What did he say?

MRS. DE MULLIN. Nothing. He just read it and gave it back to me without a word.

MRS. CLOUSTON. That's the last you've heard of her, I suppose?

MRS. DE MULLIN. Oh no, Harriet.

MRS. CLOUSTON. Do you mean to say she goes *on* writing? And you allow her? When Hugo said she was not to?

MRS. DE MULLIN [*meekly*]. Yes. Not often, Harriet. Only occasionally.

MRS. CLOUSTON. She has no business to write at all.

MRS. DE MULLIN. Her letters are quite short. Sometimes I wish they were longer. They really tell one nothing about herself, though I often ask her.

MRS. CLOUSTON. You *ask* her! Then *you* write too!

MRS. DE MULLIN. I answer her letters, of course. Otherwise she wouldn't go on writing.

MRS. CLOUSTON. Really, Jane, I'm surprised at you. So you've actually been corresponding with Janet all these years—and never told *me*! I think you've behaved very badly.

MRS. DE MULLIN. I didn't like to, Harriet.

MRS. CLOUSTON. Didn't like to!

MRS. DE MULLIN. And as you don't think I *ought* to hear from her . . .

MRS. CLOUSTON. I don't think you ought to hear from her, of course. But as you do hear naturally I should like to have seen the letters.

MRS. DE MULLIN. I didn't know that, Harriet. In fact, I thought you would rather not. When a dreadful thing like this happens in a family it seems best not to write about it or to speak of it either, doesn't it? Hugo and I never speak of it.

MRS. CLOUSTON. Does Hugo know you hear from her?

MRS. DE MULLIN. I think not. I have never told him. Nor Hester. I'm sure Hester would disapprove.

MRS. CLOUSTON. My dear Jane, what *can* it matter whether Hester approves or not? Hester knows nothing about such things. At *her* age!

MRS. DE MULLIN. Hester is twenty-eight.

MRS. CLOUSTON. Exactly. A girl like that.

MRS. DE MULLIN [*sighs*]. Girls have such very strong opinions nowadays.

MRS. CLOUSTON. What does Janet live on? Teaching?

MRS. DE MULLIN. I suppose so. She had her Aunt Miriam's legacy, of course.

MRS. CLOUSTON. Only four hundred pounds.

MRS. DE MULLIN. Yes.

MRS. CLOUSTON. I never approved of that legacy, Jane. Girls oughtn't to have money left them. It makes them too independent.

MRS. DE MULLIN. Aunt Miriam was always so fond of Janet.

MRS. CLOUSTON. Then she should have left the money to Hugo. Fathers are the proper people to leave money to.

MRS. DE MULLIN. Hugo did have the *management* of the money—till Janet was twenty-one.

MRS. CLOUSTON. Why only till she was twenty-one?

MRS. DE MULLIN. It was so in Aunt Miriam's will. Of course, Hugo would have gone on managing it for her. It was very little trouble as it was all in Consols. But Janet said she would rather look after it for herself.

MRS. CLOUSTON. Ridiculous! As if girls could possibly manage money!

MRS. DE MULLIN. So Hugo said. But Janet insisted. So she got her way.

MRS. CLOUSTON. What did she do with it? Spend it?

MRS. DE MULLIN. No. Put it into a railway, she said.

MRS. CLOUSTON. A railway! How dangerous!

MRS. DE MULLIN. She said she would prefer it. She said railways sometimes went up. Consols never.

MRS. CLOUSTON. She lost it all, of course?

MRS. DE MULLIN. I don't know, Harriet.

MRS. CLOUSTON. You don't *know*?

MRS. DE MULLIN. No. I never liked to ask. Hugo was rather hurt about the whole thing, so the subject was never referred to.

MRS. CLOUSTON. Let me see. The child must be eight years old by now.

MRS. DE MULLIN. Just eight. It will be nine years next March since Janet went away.

MRS. CLOUSTON. What did she call him?

MRS. DE MULLIN. Johnny.

MRS. CLOUSTON. Johnny! None of the De Mullins have ever been called *Johnny*.

MRS. DE MULLIN. Perhaps it was his father's name.

MRS. CLOUSTON. Perhaps so. [*Pause.*

MRS. DE MULLIN. Do you think I ought to tell Hugo about Janet's coming!

MRS. CLOUSTON. Certainly.

MRS. DE MULLIN. I thought perhaps . . .

MRS. CLOUSTON. Nonsense, Jane. Of course he must be told. You ought to have told him from the very beginning.

MRS. DE MULLIN. Do you mean when I sent the telegram? But Hugo was unconscious.

MRS. CLOUSTON. As soon as he recovered consciousness then.

MRS. DE MULLIN. I did mean to. But he seemed so weak, and Dr. Rolt said any excitement . . .

MRS. CLOUSTON. Dr. Rolt!

MRS. DE MULLIN [*goaded*]. Well, I couldn't tell that Dr. Rolt knew so little about Hugo's illness, could I? And I was afraid of the shock.

MRS. CLOUSTON. Still, he should have been told at once. It was the only chance.

MRS. DE MULLIN. Yes. I see that now. But I was afraid of the shock, as I said. So I put it off. And then, when I didn't hear from Janet, I thought I would wait.

MRS. CLOUSTON. Why?

MRS. DE MULLIN. You see I didn't know whether she was coming. And if she didn't come, of course there was no necessity for telling Hugo anything about it. I'm afraid he'll be very angry.

MRS. CLOUSTON. At any rate, you must tell him now. The sooner the better.

MRS. DE MULLIN [*meekly*]. Very well, Harriet. If you think so.

MRS. CLOUSTON. You had better go up to him at once.

[MRS. DE MULLIN *goes to the door on the left, opens it, then draws back hastily.*]

MRS. DE MULLIN. Here *is* Hugo. He's just coming across the hall. With Hester. How unlucky.

MRS. CLOUSTON. I don't see that it matters.

MRS. DE MULLIN. I'd rather not have told him before Hester.

[MRS. CLOUSTON *shrugs her shoulders. A moment later* HUGO *enters. He leans on a stick and* HESTER'S *arm. He looks weak and pale and altogether extremely sorry for himself, obviously a nervous and a very tiresome patient.*]

HESTER. Carefully, father. That's right. Will you lie on the sofa?

DE MULLIN [*fretfully*]. No. Put me in the arm-chair. I'm tired of lying down.

HESTER. Very well. Let me help you. There. Wait a moment. I'll fetch you some pillows.

[*Props him up on pillows in an arm-chair.*

DE MULLIN. Thank you.

[*Lies back exhausted and closes his eyes.*

MRS. DE MULLIN [*going to him*]. How are you feeling now, Hugo?

DE MULLIN. Very weak.

MRS. DE MULLIN. I wonder if you ought to have come down?

DE MULLIN. It won't make any difference. Nothing will make any difference any more, Jane. I shan't last much longer. I'm worn out.

HESTER. Father!

DE MULLIN. Yes, Hester. Worn out [*with a sort of melancholy pride*]. None of the De Mullins have been strong. I'm the last of them. The last of the De Mullins.

MRS. CLOUSTON. Come, Hugo, you mustn't talk in that morbid way.

DE MULLIN. I'm not morbid, Harriet. But I feel tired, tired.

MRS. DE MULLIN. You'll be better in a day or two.

DE MULLIN. No, Jane. I shall never be better. Never in *this* world. [*Pause.*

MRS. DE MULLIN [*nervously*]. Hugo . . . there's something . . . something I have to tell you . . .

DE MULLIN. What is it, Jane? [*Fretfully.*] What have you been keeping from me?

MRS. DE MULLIN. I ought to have told you before. Only I didn't like . . .

DE MULLIN. Is it something about my illness?

MRS. DE MULLIN. Oh no, Hugo.

DE MULLIN [*relieved*]. I thought Dr. Rolt might have said something.

MRS. DE MULLIN. It's nothing of that kind.

DE MULLIN [*peevishly*]. Well, well, what is it?

MRS. DE MULLIN. Hugo, some one is coming here to-day, to see *you.*

DE MULLIN. To see *me*? Who?

MRS. DE MULLIN. You won't be angry, Hugo?

DE MULLIN [*testily*]. How can I possibly say that, Jane, when I don't know who it is?

MRS. DE MULLIN. Hugo, it's . . . [*Bell rings loudly.*] Harriet, there's the bell! I wonder if it's she? Do you think it is?

[*All look towards the door on the right expectantly.*]

DE MULLIN [*querulously*]. Well, Jane? *Am* I to hear who this visitor is or am I not?

ELLEN [*showing in a lady leading a little boy by the hand*]. Mrs. Seagrave.

Enter JANET *and* JOHNNY. JANET *is a very handsome woman of six-and-thirty. She is admirably dressed, but her clothes are quiet and in excellent taste, dark in colour and plain in cut but expensive. Her hat is particularly tasteful, but also quiet. Her clothes are in marked contrast to those of her mother and sister, which are of the homeliest description and were probably made in the village.* JOHNNY *is a well-grown youngster of eight in a sailor suit.*

HESTER [*shocked*]. Mother!

DE MULLIN. Janet, my dear! [*Cry of welcome.*

JANET. Father! [*Drops* JOHNNY'S *hand, comes rapidly to him, falls on one knee and kisses him impulsively, patting his left hand with her right.*] How are you? Better? [*Holding out her left hand to her mother, but still kneeling.*] How do you do, mother dear? [MRS. DE MULLIN *takes it. Puts her other hand on* JANET'S *shoulder.*] I should have come before, father, directly you sent for me. But your telegram was delayed. I was away from home.

DE MULLIN [*nods*]. I see.

JANET. Have you been very ill, father? And did you frighten them all dreadfully? How naughty of you!

DE MULLIN. Silly Janet! Let me look at you, my dear. [*Looks at her face as she holds it up.*] You're not much changed, Janet.

JANET. Nor are you, father.

DE MULLIN. A little greyer, perhaps.

JANET. No! Not a hair!

DE MULLIN. Well, my dear, I'm glad you've come. We parted in anger, but that's all over now. Forgotten and forgiven. Eh?

JANET. Yes. Forgotten and forgiven. [*Rises.*] How are you, Aunt Harriet? I didn't see you. [*Eagerly.*] Hester!

[*Goes to her impulsively, holding out her hand.* HESTER *takes it coldly.* JANET *tries to draw her towards her.* HESTER *resists. She drops her hand and* HESTER *turns away.*]

DE MULLIN. Who is that? [*Pointing to* JOHNNY.

JANET [*turning to him*]. That is Johnny. My son.

DE MULLIN. My grandson?

JANET. Yes. I *had* to bring him, father. We were away from home and there was no one to leave him with.

DE MULLIN. I'm glad you brought him. Come here, Johnny. Don't be afraid.

JOHNNY [*in his confident treble*]. I'm not afraid. Why should I be afraid? [*Goes to him.*

DE MULLIN [*taking his hand*]. Say "How do you do, grandfather?"

JOHNNY. How do you do, grandfather?

DE MULLIN. Will you give me a kiss, Johnny?

JOHNNY. If you like, grandfather. [*Kisses him.*

DE MULLIN. That's a good boy.

JANET. Kiss your grandmother too, Johnny.

[MRS. DE MULLIN *snatches him up and kisses him pas-*

sionately. Then holds him a little way off and looks at him admiringly.]

Mrs. De Mullin. What a fine little fellow, Janet!

Janet [*proudly*]. Isn't he, mother? And *so* strong and healthy! He's hardly had a day's illness since he was born.

Johnny [*who has been staring at the pictures on the walls, holding his grandmother by one hand*]. Who are all these old men, grandfather?

De Mullin. Your ancestors, my boy.

Johnny. What's ancestors?

De Mullin. Your forefathers. Your mother's forefathers.

Johnny. Is that old man in the wig an ancestor?

De Mullin. Yes. That is Anthony De Mullin, your great-great-grandfather.

Johnny. What was *he*?

De Mullin [*puzzled*]. *What* was he? I don't know that he was anything in particular. He was just a gentleman.

Johnny [*disappointed*]. Is that all?

De Mullin. Don't make any mistake, my boy. It's a great thing to be descended from gentlepeople, a thing to be proud of and to be thankful for.

Johnny. Mother says the great thing is for every one to be of some use in the world. Are gentlepeople of more use in the world than other people, grandfather?

De Mullin. Certainly.

Johnny. And were all these old men gentlepeople?

De Mullin. All of them. And you must grow up like them.

Johnny. They're very *ugly*, grandfather. [*Pause.*] What did they *do*?

De Mullin. They lived down here at Brendon.

Johnny. Nothing else?

DE MULLIN. They looked after their land.

JOHNNY. Had they much land?

DE MULLIN. A great deal. At one time the De Mullins owned all the land about here.

JOHNNY. How much do they own now?

DE MULLIN [*sighs*]. . Not very much, I'm afraid.

JOHNNY. Then they can't have looked after it very well, can they, grandfather?

MRS. DE MULLIN [*feeling the strain of this conversation*]. Now, Hugo, do you think you ought to talk any more? Why not go upstairs for a little and lie down?

DE MULLIN. Perhaps I will, Jane. I *am* a little tired.

HESTER. Shall I go with father?

MRS. DE MULLIN. No. I will. Come, Hugo.

[*Helps him up.*

DE MULLIN. Will you come with me, Johnny?

MRS. DE MULLIN [*hastily*]. No, Hugo. He will only disturb you. Stay down here, Johnny, with your mother. Now then. Carefully.

[*Leads* DE MULLIN *off by the door on the left. There is a pause, during which the remaining occupants of the room obviously have nothing in particular to say to each other. At last* MRS. CLOUSTON *speaks.*]

MRS. CLOUSTON. Well, Janet, how have you been all these years?

JANET [*nonchalantly*]. All right, Aunt Harriet. And you?

MRS. CLOUSTON. Pretty well, thanks.

JANET. Are you still living down at Bath?

MRS. CLOUSTON. Yes. You live in London, Jane tells me.

JANET. Yes.

MRS. CLOUSTON. What do you do there? Teach?

JANET. Oh no. Why should I be teaching?

MRS. CLOUSTON. Jane said you wanted to teach at one time.

JANET. That was years ago. Before I left Brendon. I soon gave up that idea. No. I keep a shop.

MRS. CLOUSTON. A shop!

JANET. Yes. A hat-shop.

MRS. CLOUSTON. Good heavens! A De Mullin in a hat-shop!

JANET [*a little maliciously*]. Not a De Mullin, Aunt Harriet. A Seagrave.

MRS. CLOUSTON. Did Mr. Seagrave keep a hat-shop?

JANET. Mr. Seagrave? . . . Oh, I see. No. It's not a man's hat-shop. It's a ladies'. [*Takes off hat.*] This is one of ours. What do you think of it, Hester?

HESTER [*frostily*]. It looks very expensive.

JANET [*looking at it critically*]. Yes, I own I'm rather pleased with it.

MRS. CLOUSTON [*acidly*]. You seem to be able to *dress* very well altogether, in spite of the shop.

JANET [*correcting her*]. Because of it, Aunt Harriet. That's the advantage of being what is called "in trade." If I were a school teacher or a governess or something genteel of that kind I could only afford to dress like a pauper. But as I keep a shop I can dress like a lady. Clothes are a question of money, after all, aren't they?

MRS. CLOUSTON [*contemptuously*]. If one is in a shop it doesn't matter *how* one dresses.

JANET. On the contrary, if one is in a shop it matters a great deal. A girl in a shop *must* dress well. The business demands it. If you ever start a hat-shop, Aunt Harriet, you'll have to dress very differently. Otherwise nobody will buy your hats.

MRS. CLOUSTON. Indeed? Fortunately I've no intention of starting a shop of any kind.

JANET [*blandly*]. No? Well, I expect you're wise. I doubt if you'd make a success of it.

[*Loud ring heard off.*

MRS. CLOUSTON [*rather flustered, gasps*]. Hester! I

hope that's not a visitor. [JANET *stares. Then laughs good-humouredly.* AUNT HARRIET'S *nervous desire to keep her out of the way of visitors strikes her as amusing*]. What *are* you laughing at, Janet?

JANET [*shrugs*]. Nothing, Aunt Harriet.

ELLEN [*announces*]. Miss Deanes. Mr. Brown.

[MISS DEANES *is a bulky, red-faced, short-sighted woman of forty-two, very fussy and absurd in manner, who talks very fast.* BROWN *carries a book.*]

MISS DEANES. How do you do, Mrs. Clouston? *Such* a piece of news! I felt I *must* tell you. I brought Mr. Brown with me. He was just leaving a book for you, Hester, so I made him come in.

[*Shakes hands with* HESTER.

BROWN. Here it is, Miss De Mullin. It's the one you wanted to borrow. "Blore on the Creeds."

HESTER. Thank you.

MISS DEANES [*seeing* JANET *for first time*]. Janet! Is that you?

JANET. Yes, Miss Deanes. How are you?

[*Shakes hands.*

MISS DEANES. Good gracious, child, when did you come? Why, you've not been down to Brendon for years.

JANET. It is a long time, isn't it?

MISS DEANES. And who is this young gentleman?

[*Noticing* JOHNNY *who is holding* JANET'S *hand and staring at* MISS DEANES.]

JANET [*calmly*]. That is my son. Shake hands with Miss Deanes, Johnny.

MISS DEANES [*astonished*]. Your son! There now! And I never knew you were even married!

JANET [*quite at her ease*]. Didn't you?

MISS DEANES. No.

MRS. CLOUSTON [*nervously*]. I forgot. I haven't introduced you. Mr. Brown—Mrs. Seagrave.

BROWN [*bows*]. How do you do?

MRS. CLOUSTON [*turning to* MISS DEANES *again*]. And now what *is* your piece of news, Miss Deanes?

MISS DEANES [*volubly*]. Oh yes. I *must* tell you. You'd never guess. Somebody *else* is engaged to be married. [*To* JANET.] *Who* do you think?

JANET. I've no idea.

MISS DEANES. Bertha Aldenham—to Mr. Bulstead.

JANET [*starts*]. Mr. Bulstead?

MISS DEANES. Yes. But I forgot. *You* wouldn't know *them.* They didn't come here till long after you went away. They bought Brendon Park from the Malcolms three years ago. You remember the Malcolms, Janet?

JANET [*whose attention has wandered*]. Eh? Oh yes, of course.

MRS. CLOUSTON. Which Mr. Bulstead is it? The eldest?

MISS DEANES. Yes, Montague.

JANET [*under her breath*]. Monty Bulstead! Engaged!

MRS. CLOUSTON. Are the Aldenhams pleased?

MISS DEANES. Very, I expect. The Bulsteads are so rich, you see.

JANET. Does he live down here; this Mr. Montague Bulstead, I mean?

MISS DEANES. Oh no. He's here on leave. He's in the Army. He only got back three months ago. [*With little giggle.*] He and Bertha haven't taken long to settle things, have they?

JANET. No, they haven't taken long.

MISS DEANES. But I dare say he *will* live here when he's married. As the Bulsteads are so rich. The father makes frilling and lace and so on. All those things people used to make so much better by hand. And Bertha may not care about Army life. I know I shouldn't. [JANET *smiles discreetly.*] It's not always very *nice,* is it?

BROWN [*to* JOHNNY, *who has been staring at him round-eyed across the room, with heavy geniality*]. Well, young man. Who are you staring at, eh? Do *you* want to talk to *me*?

JOHNNY [*quite simply, in his high piping treble*]. No, thank you.

JANET. Sh! Johnny! You don't mean that. Go to Mr. Brown when he speaks to you.

JOHNNY. Very well, Mummie. [*Does so slowly.*

BROWN [*taking his hands*]. Now then, what shall *we* talk about, you and I?

JOHNNY. I don't know.

BROWN. Don't you? Suppose we see if you can say your catechism then? Would you like *that*?

JOHNNY. What's catechism?

BROWN. Come, Johnny, I'm sure your mother has taught you your catechism. Can you repeat your "Duty towards your Neighbour"? (JOHNNY *shakes his head emphatically.*] Try—"My duty towards my neighbour. . ."

JOHNNY. Mother says it's every one's duty to be healthy and to be happy. Is that what you mean?

BROWN [*scandalised*]. No! No!

JOHNNY. Well, that's what mother taught me.

JANET [*coming to the rescue*]. I'm afraid he doesn't know his catechism yet, Mr. Brown. You see, he's only eight. [BROWN *bows stiffly.*] Run away, Johnny, and play in the garden for a little.

[*Leads him to the door in the bay.*

JOHNNY. All right, Mummie.

[JOHNNY *runs out into the garden. A certain relief is perceptible on his departure. It is felt that his interview with* MR. BROWN *has not been a success.*]

MISS DEANES [*who feels that a change of subject will be only tactful*]. There now, Hester! I do believe you've never asked after Dicky! He'll be *so* offended!

HESTER [*smiling*]. Has Dicky been ill again? I thought you said he was better yesterday.

MISS DEANES. He was. But he had a relapse, poor *darling*. I had to sit up all last night with him.

JANET. What has been the matter with him?

MISS DEANES. Some sort of chill, Dr. Rolt said. I was *dreadfully* anxious.

JANET. What a pity! Colds are such troublesome things for children.

MISS DEANES [*puzzled*]. Children?

JANET. Yes. You were speaking of a child, weren't you?

MISS DEANES. Oh no. Dicky is my *cockatoo*. He's the *sweetest* bird. Talks quite like a human being. And never a coarse expression. That's so unusual with cockatoos.

JANET. Indeed?

MISS DEANES. Yes. The voyage, you see. They come all the way from South America, and generally they pick up the most dreadful language, poor lambs—from the sailors. But Dicky didn't. He has such a pure mind. [*Rising.*] And now I really must be going. I have all kinds of people I want to tell about Mr. Bulstead's engagement. [*Shaking hands with* MRS. CLOUSTON *and* JANET.

BROWN. I must be off too. Wait one moment, Miss Deanes. Good-bye, Mrs. Clouston. [*Shakes hands with* MRS. CLOUSTON *and bows stiffly to* JANET. *He has not yet forgiven* JOHNNY *for not knowing his catechism. To* HESTER.] Good-bye, Miss De Mullin. Shall I see you at Evensong? [*Shakes hands with* HESTER.

HESTER. I expect so.

[BROWN *and* MISS DEANES *go out.*]

JANET. Poof!

MRS. CLOUSTON. Janet!

JANET. What a fool Miss Deanes is!

MRS. CLOUSTON [*indifferently*]. She always was, wasn't she?

JANET. I suppose so. Going on in that way about a ridiculous cockatoo! And that *hideous* little curate!

HESTER. I don't see why you should sneer at all my friends.

JANET. Are they your friends, Hester? Then I won't sneer at them. But you can't call Mr. Brown *handsome*, can you?

HESTER. Mr. Brown is a very good man and works very hard among the poor. That's better than being handsome.

JANET. Yes. But less agreeable, isn't it? However, if *you* like him there's an end of it. But he needn't have begun asking Johnny his catechism the very first time he met him. *I* don't call it good manners.

HESTER. How was he to know the poor child was being brought up to be a little heathen?

[*Takes up her hat and cape and begins putting them on.*]

JANET [*shrugs*]. How, indeed!

MRS. CLOUSTON. Are you going out, Hester? Lunch will be ready in half an hour.

HESTER. Only to take Mrs. Wason her soup, Aunt Harriet.

JANET [*looking curiously at* HESTER]. Do you want to marry Mr. Brown, Hester?

MRS. CLOUSTON. My dear Janet!

JANET. Well, Aunt Harriet, there's nothing to be ashamed of if she does. Do you, Hester?

HESTER. Why do you ask such a question?

JANET. Never mind. Only answer it. [*Pause.*] You do like him, don't you?

HESTER. I've a great respect for Mr. Brown.

JANET. Don't blush, my dear. I dare say that's much the same thing.

HESTER. I won't talk to you about it. You only sneer.

JANET. I wasn't sneering. Come, Hester, don't be cross. Why shouldn't we be friends? I might help you.

HESTER. How could *you* help me?

JANET [*looking quizzically at poor* HESTER'S *head-gear*]. I might make you a hat, my dear.

HESTER. Mr. Brown doesn't notice those things.

JANET. All men notice those things, Hester.

HESTER [*with a sneer*]. I suppose that's why *you* wear such fine clothes.

JANET [*quite good-humoured*]. That's it. Fine feathers make fine birds.

HESTER. Well, *I* call it shameless.

JANET. My dear Hester, you're always being ashamed of things. You always were, I remember. What is there to be ashamed of in that? What on earth were women given pretty faces and pretty figures for if not to make men admire them and want to marry them?

HESTER [*acidly*]. Well, *your* plan hasn't been very successful so far, anyhow!

JANET [*quietly*]. Nor has yours, Hester.

[HESTER *makes exclamation of impatience and seems about to reply angrily. Then thinks better of it and goes out without a word.* JANET *follows her retreat with her eyes and smiles half cynically, half compassionately. The Curtain falls.*]

ACT II

SCENE.—*On the edge of Brendon Forest. Time, three days later. A road runs along the back of the Stage, from which it is separated by a fence and high hedge. In this but somewhat to the right is a Stile and also a gate. Round the trunk of a large tree to the left is a rough wooden seat. The Stage is empty when the Curtain rises. Then enter* MRS. DE MULLIN, JANET *and* JOHNNY. *They approach Stile from the left and come through gate. There is an exit on the right of the Stage through the Forest.*

JANET. I don't think I'll come any farther, mother.

MRS. DE MULLIN. You won't come up to the house?

JANET. No, thanks. [*Rather grimly.*] I don't want to see Mrs. Bulstead. And I'm sure Mrs. Bulstead doesn't want to see me.

MRS. DE MULLIN. I wish Hester could have come.

JANET. Why couldn't she?

MRS. DE MULLIN. She's at the church putting up the decorations. It's the Harvest Thanksgiving to-morrow.

JANET [*laughing*]. Mr. Brown!

MRS. DE MULLIN. Janet, I told you you weren't to laugh at Hester about Mr. Brown. It's not kind.

JANET [*lightly*]. It's all right, mother. Hester's not here.

MRS. DE MULLIN. Still, I don't like it, dear. It's not quite . . .

JANET [*soothing her*]. Not quite *nice*. I know, mother. Not the way really refined and ladylike young women talk.

But I'm only quite a common person who sells hats. You can't expect all these refinements from *me*!

[Mrs. De Mullin *sighs.*]

Mrs. De Mullin. Are you going to turn back?

Janet. Not at once. I'll wait for you here a little with Johnny, in case they're out. Why, they've put a seat here. [*She sits on the side farthest from the road.*

Mrs. De Mullin. Usen't there to be one?

Janet. No. Nor a gate in my time. Only a stile.

Mrs. De Mullin. Very likely, dear. I don't remember. I don't often come this way.

Janet [*nods*]. I often used to come along it in the old days.

Mrs. De Mullin. I dare say. Well, I must be getting on to my call or I shall be late. You're sure you won't come?

Janet. Quite, mother. Good-bye.

[Mrs. De Mullin *goes off through the forest.*]

Johnny. Where's grandmother going, Mummie?

Janet. Up to the big house.

Johnny. What big house?

Janet. Brendon Park.

Johnny. Mayn't I go up to the big house too?

Janet. No, dear. You're to stay with mother.

Johnny. Who lives at the big house?

Janet. Nobody you know, dear.

Johnny. That's why I asked, Mummie.

Janet. Well, don't ask any more, sonny. Mother's rather tired. Run away and play, there's a good boy.

[*Kisses him.*

Johnny. Very well, Mummie.

[Johnny *disappears into the wood.* Janet *falls into a brown study. Presently a footstep is heard coming along the*

road, but she seems to notice nothing. Then a young man climbs over the stile. He starts as he sees her and draws back, then advances eagerly, holding out his hand.]

JANET. Monty!

MONTY. Janet! Is that *you*?

JANET [*smiling*]. Yes, Monty.

MONTY [*astonished*]. Janet! Here!

JANET. Yes, Monty.

MONTY [*nodding over his shoulder*]. *Our* stile, Janet!

JANET. Our stile.

MONTY [*nods*]. The stile where you and I first met.

JANET [*relapsing for a moment into something like sentiment*]. Yes. I thought I must see it again—for the sake of old times.

MONTY. How long ago it all seems!

JANET [*matter-of-fact*]. It *is* a longish time, you know.

MONTY [*thoughtfully*]. I believe that was the happiest month of my life, Janet.

JANET. Was it, Monty?

MONTY. Yes. [*Pause.*] I say, when did you come down? You don't *live* at home any longer, do you?

JANET. No. I only came down three days ago.

MONTY. By Jove, it *is* good to see you again! Why, it's eight years since we used to be together, you and I.

JANET. Nearly nine.

MONTY. Yes. . . . You're not coming to live down here again, are you?

JANET. No. Why?

MONTY. I thought perhaps . . .

JANET [*cynically*]. Would you dislike it very much if I did, Monty?

MONTY. Of course not.

JANET. Confess. You *did* feel it would be rather awkward?

MONTY. Well, of course . . .

JANET. However, you can set your mind at rest. I'm not.

[*His relief at this intelligence enables him to realise the pleasure he is getting from seeing her again.*]

MONTY. I say, Janet, how well you're looking! I believe you're handsomer than ever.

JANET [*smiling*]. Am I?

MONTY. You know you are.

[*Pause. He looks at her admiringly. She turns away with a little smile.*]

JANET [*feeling that they are getting on to dangerous ground*]. Well, Monty. Where have you been these eight years?

MONTY. Abroad with my regiment. We've been ordered all over the place. I've been home on leave, of course. But not for the last three years. Not since father bought the Park. I've never been at Brendon since . . .

[*Pause.*

JANET. Since *we* were here? Don't blush, Monty. [*He nods shamefacedly.*] How did he come to buy the place?

MONTY. It was just a chance. He saw it advertised, came and looked at it and bought it. He's no idea I was ever at Brendon before. [*Rather bitter laugh.*] None of them have. I have to pretend not to know my way about.

JANET. Why?

MONTY. It seems safer. [JANET *nods.*] Sometimes I almost forget to keep it up. I'm such a duffer about things. But I've managed hitherto. And now, of course, it's all right, as I've been here three months. I may be supposed to know the beastly place by this time.

JANET. Beastly! You're not very polite.

[MONTY *laughs shamefacedly.*]

MONTY. You got my note, didn't you?

JANET. What note? . . . Oh, eight years ago, you mean? Yes.

MONTY. I left it with the woman at the lodgings. As you were coming over that afternoon, I thought it safer than sending a message. And of course I daren't telegraph. [JANET *nods.*] I was awfully sick at having to go away like that. All in a moment. Without even saying good-bye. But I had to.

JANET. Of course. Was your mother badly hurt?

MONTY. No. Only stunned. That was such rot. If people get chucked out of a carriage they must expect to get stunned. But of course they couldn't know. The telegram just said "Mother hurt. Carriage accident. Come at once." It got to me at the lodgings a couple of hours before you were coming. I had just time to chuck my things into a bag and catch the train. I wanted to come back after the mater was all right again. But I couldn't very well, could I?

JANET. Why not?

MONTY. Well, the regiment was to sail in less than three weeks, and the mater would have thought it rather rough if I'd gone away again. I'd been away six weeks as it was.

JANET. Oh yes. Of course.

MONTY [*with half a sigh*]. To think if I hadn't happened to be riding along that road and seen you at the stile and asked my way, you and I might never have met. What a chance life is!

JANET [*nods*]. Just a chance. [*Pause.*

MONTY. Why did you go away, Janet? You weren't going the last time I saw you.

JANET. Wasn't I?

MONTY. No. At least you said nothing about it.

JANET. I didn't know I was going then. Not for certain.

MONTY. Why *did* you go?

JANET [*quietly*]. I had to, Monty.

MONTY [*puzzled*]. You had to? [JANET *nods.*] But why?

JANET. Mother found out.

MONTY. About us?

JANET. Yes. And she told father.

MONTY [*genuinely distressed*]. Oh, Janet, I'm so sorry!

JANET [*shrugs*]. It couldn't be helped.

MONTY. Does he know who it was?

JANET. Who *you* were? No.

MONTY. You didn't tell him?

JANET. Monty! As if I should.

MONTY. I don't know. Girls generally do.

JANET. *I* didn't.

MONTY. No. I suppose you wouldn't. But you're different from most girls. Do you know there was always something rather splendid about you, Janet?

JANET [*curtsies*]. Thank you.

MONTY. I wonder he didn't *make* you tell.

JANET. He did try, of course. That was why I ran away.

MONTY. I see. Where did you go to?

JANET. London.

MONTY. To London? All alone? [JANET *nods.*] Why did you do that? And why didn't you let me know?

JANET [*shrugs*]. You were out of England by that time.

MONTY. But why London?

JANET. I had to go somewhere. And it seemed better to go where I shouldn't be known. Besides it's easier to be lost sight of in a crowd.

MONTY. But what did you do when you got there?

JANET [*calmly*]. I got a place in a shop, Monty.

MONTY. A shop? You!

JANET. Yes, a hat-shop, in Regent Street. My dear Monty, don't gape like that. Hat-shops are perfectly

respectable places. Almost too respectable to judge by the fuss two of them made about employing *me*.

MONTY. What do you mean?

JANET. Well, when I applied to them for work they naturally asked if I had ever worked in a hat-shop before. And when I said "No," they naturally asked why I wanted to begin. In the innocence of my heart I told them. Whereupon they at once refused to employ me—not in the politest terms.

MONTY. Poor Janet. What beastly luck! Still . . . [*Hesitates.*

JANET. Yes, Monty.

MONTY. I mean, naturally they couldn't be expected . . .

JANET. Monty!

MONTY [*flustered*]. At least I don't mean that exactly. Only . . . [*Stops.*

JANET. My dear Monty, I quite understand what you mean. You needn't trouble to be explicit. Naturally they couldn't be expected to employ an abandoned person like me to trim hats. That was exactly their view.

MONTY. But I thought you said you *did* get a place in a shop?

JANET. Yes. But not at either of *those* shops. They were *far* too virtuous.

MONTY. How did you do it?

JANET. Told lies, Monty. I believe that's how most women get employment.

MONTY. Told lies?

JANET. Yes. I invented a husband, recently deceased, bought several yards of crape and a wedding ring. This is the ring. [*Takes off glove.*

MONTY. Oh, Janet, how beastly for you!

[JANET *shrugs.*]

JANET [*laughing*]. Everything seems to be "beastly"

to you, Monty. Brendon and telling lies and lots of other things. Luckily I'm less superfine.

MONTY. Didn't they find out?

JANET. No. That was why I decided to be a widow. It made inquiries more difficult.

MONTY. I should have thought it made them easier.

JANET. On the contrary. You can't cross-question a widow about a recent bereavement. If you do she cries. I always used to look tearful directly my husband's name was even mentioned. So they gave up mentioning it. Women are so boring when they will cry.

MONTY. They might have inquired from other people.

JANET. Why should they? Besides there was no one to inquire from. I called him Seagrave—and drowned him at sea. You can't ask questions of the sharks.

MONTY. Oh, Janet, how can you joke about it?

JANET. I couldn't—then. I wanted work too badly. But I can now—with your kind permission, I mean.

MONTY. And you've been at the shop ever since?

JANET. Not *that* shop. I was only there about six months—till baby was born, in fact . . .

MONTY [*horrified*]. Janet, there was a baby!

JANET. Of course there was a baby.

MONTY. Oh, Janet! And you never wrote! Why didn't you write?

JANET. I did think of it. But on the whole I thought I wouldn't. It would have been no good.

MONTY. No good?

JANET. Not then. You were in India. I was in England.

MONTY. You ought to have written at once—directly your mother found out.

JANET. One week after you sailed, Monty? [*Defiantly.*] Besides, why should I write?

MONTY. Why? I could have married you, of course.

JANET. If I'd asked you, you mean? Thank you, my dear Monty.

MONTY. No, I don't. Of course I should have married you. I *must* have married you.

JANET [*looking at him thoughtfully*]. I wonder if you would.

MONTY. Certainly I should. I should have been bound in honour.

JANET. I see. Then I'm glad I never wrote.

MONTY. You're *glad?* Now?

JANET. Yes. I've done some foolish things in my life, Monty, but none quite so foolish as that. To marry a schoolboy, not because he loves you or wants to marry you, but because he thinks he's "bound in honour." No, thank you.

MONTY. I don't mean that. You know I don't, Janet. I loved you, of course. That goes without saying. I'd have married you like a shot before, only the Governor would have made such a fuss. The Governor was so awfully strait-laced about this sort of thing. When I was sent away from Eton he made the most ghastly fuss.

JANET. Were you sent away from Eton for "this sort of thing"?

MONTY. Yes—at least I don't mean that either. But it was about a girl there. He was frightfully wild. He threatened to cut me off if I ever did such a thing again. Such rot! As if no one had ever been sent away from school before!

JANET [*reflectively*]. I didn't know you'd been sent away from Eton.

MONTY. Didn't you? I suppose I didn't like to tell you—for fear of what you'd think [*bitterly.*] I seem to have been afraid of everything in those days.

JANET. Not *everything*, Monty.

MONTY. Oh, you know what I mean. I was awfully afraid of the Governor, I remember. I suppose all boys

are if their parents rag them too much. But I would have married you, Janet, if I'd known. I would honestly.

JANET [*blandly*]. What is the pay of a British subaltern, Monty?

MONTY. The Governor would have had to stump up, of course.

JANET. Poor Mr. Bulstead! He'd have *liked* that, I suppose? And what about your poor unhappy colonel? And all the other little subalterns?

MONTY [*obstinately*]. Still, you ought to have written.

JANET [*quietly*]. *You* never wrote.

MONTY. I couldn't. You know that. You never would let me. That was why I couldn't send that note to you to tell you I was going away. You said my letters would be noticed.

JANET. Yes. I forgot that. That's the result of having a father who is what is called old-fashioned.

MONTY. What do you mean?

JANET. All letters to the Manor House are delivered locked in a bag. They always have been since the Flood, I believe, or at least since the invention of the postal service. And of course father won't have it altered. So every morning there's the ritual of unlocking this absurd bag. No one is allowed to do that but father—unless he is ill. Then mother has the privilege. And of course he scrutinises the outside of every letter and directly it's opened asks who it's from and what's inside it. Your letters would have been noticed at once.

MONTY. How beastly!

JANET. The penalty of having nothing to do, Monty.

MONTY. I know. What a mess the whole thing is!

JANET. Just so. No. There was no way out of it except the hat-shop.

MONTY [*remorsefully*]. It's awfully rough on you, Janet.

JANET. Never mind. I dare say I wasn't cut out for

the wife of a subaltern, Monty ; whereas I make excellent hats.

MONTY [*savagely*]. You're still making the d——d things ?

JANET. Yes. Only at another shop. The Regent Street place had no room for me when I was well enough to go back to work. But the woman who kept it gave me a recommendation to a friend who was starting in Hanover Street. A most superior quarter for a hat-shop, Monty. In fact *the* superior quarter. Claude et Cie was the name.

MONTY [*rather shocked*]. A *French* shop ?

JANET. No more French than you are, Monty. It was kept by a Miss Hicks, one of the most thoroughly British people you can possibly imagine. But we called ourselves Claude et Cie in order to be able to charge people more for their hats. You can always charge fashionable women more for their clothes if you pretend to be French. It's one of the imbecilities of commerce. So poor dear Miss Hicks became Madame Claude and none of our hats cost less than seven guineas.

MONTY. Do people buy hats at such a price ?

JANET. Oh yes. Everybody in Society bought them. Claude et Cie was quite the rage that season. Nobody who was anybody went anywhere else.

MONTY. She must have made a great deal of money.

JANET. On the contrary. She made nothing at all and narrowly escaped bankruptcy.

MONTY. But I don't understand. If her hats were so dear and everybody bought them ?

JANET. Everybody *bought* them but nobody *paid* for them. In the highest social circles, I believe, people never do pay for anything—certainly not for their clothes. At least, nobody paid Miss Hicks, and at the end of six months she owed £1,200 and hadn't a penny to pay her rent.

MONTY. Why didn't she *make* them pay ?

JANET. She did dun them, of course, but they only

ordered more hats to keep her quiet, which didn't help Miss Hicks much. And when she went on dunning them they said they should withdraw their custom. In fact, she was in a dilemma. If she let the bills run on she couldn't pay her rent. And if she asked her customers to pay their bills they ceased to be customers.

MONTY. How beastly !

JANET. Not again, Monty !

MONTY. What *did* she do ?

JANET. She didn't do anything. She was too depressed. She used to sit in the back room where the hats were trimmed and weep over the materials, regardless of expense. Finally things came to a crisis. The landlord threatened to distrain for his rent. But just as it looked as if it was all over with Claude et Cie a capitalist came to the rescue. *I* was the capitalist.

MONTY. You ?

JANET. Yes. I'd an old aunt once who was fond of me and left me a legacy when I was seventeen. Four hundred pounds.

MONTY. That wouldn't go very far.

JANET. Four hundred pounds goes a longish way towards setting up a shop. Besides, it was nearly five hundred by that time. My shares had gone up. Well, I and my five hundred pounds came to the rescue. I paid the rent and the most clamorous of the creditors, and Miss Hicks and I became partners.

MONTY. But what was the good of that if the business was worth nothing.

JANET. It was worth several hundred pounds to anyone who had the pluck to sue half the British aristocracy. I sued them. It was tremendous fun. They were simply furious. They talked as if they'd never been sued before ! As for Miss Hicks she wept more than ever and said I'd ruined the business.

MONTY. Hadn't you ?

JANET. That business. Yes. But with the £1,200 —or as much of it as we could recover—we started a new one. A cheap hat-shop. Relatively cheap that is—for Hanover Street. We charged two guineas a hat instead of seven, 100 per cent. profit instead of . . . You can work it out for yourself. But then our terms were strictly cash, so we made no bad debts. That was my idea.

MONTY. But you said nobody ever paid for their hats.

JANET. Not in the highest social circles. But we drew our customers from the middle classes who live in South Kensington and Bayswater, and are not too haughty to pay for a hat if they see a cheap one.

MONTY. But wasn't it a frightful risk?

JANET [*cheerfully*]. It was a risk, of course. But everything in life is a risk, isn't it? And it succeeded, as I felt sure it would. We're quite a prosperous concern nowadays, and I go over to Paris four times a year to see the latest fashions. That, my dear Monty, is the history of Claude et Cie. [*Pause.*

MONTY. And you've never married, Janet?

JANET. No.

MONTY [*hesitates*]. Janet . . . is it because? . . .

JANET. Because?

MONTY. Because you still care for *me?*

JANET. Monty, don't be vain.

MONTY [*repelled*]. I didn't mean it like that. Janet, don't laugh. Of course, I'm glad if you don't care any more. At least, I suppose I ought to be glad. It would have been dreadful if you had gone on caring all these years and I not known. But did you?

JANET. No, Monty. You may set your mind at rest. I didn't.

MONTY. You're sure?

JANET. Quite. I had too many other things to think of.

MONTY. Do you mean that beastly shop?

JANET [*quietly*]. I meant my baby.

MONTY. *Our* baby. Is it alive?

JANET. Of course. What do you mean, Monty?

MONTY. I thought, as you didn't say . . . [*Thoughtfully.*] Poor little beast! [JANET *makes gesture of protest.*] Well, it's rough luck on the little beggar, isn't it? What's become of him, Janet?

JANET. What's *become* of him? My dear Monty, what should have become of him? He's quite alive, as I said, and particularly thriving.

MONTY. Do you mean he's *living* with you? . . . But, of course, I forgot, you're supposed to be married.

JANET [*correcting him*]. A widow, Monty. An inconsolable widow!

MONTY. Where is he? In London?

JANET. No. As a matter of fact he's probably not fifty yards away. Over there. [*Points toward the wood.*

MONTY [*jumping up*]. Janet!

[*Nervously looking round.*

JANET [*rallying him*]. Frightened, Monty?

MONTY. Of course not. [*Shamefacedly.*

JANET. Just a little?

MONTY [*regaining courage*]. Janet, let me see him.

JANET [*amused*]. Would you like to?

MONTY. Of course I should. He's *my* baby as well as yours, if it comes to that. Do call him, Janet.

JANET. All right. [*Calls.*] Johnny! [*Pause.*] John——ny! [*To* MONTY.] You mustn't tell him, you know.

MONTY. Of course not.

JOHNNY [*off*]. Yes, Mummie.

JANET. Come here for a minute. Mother wants to speak to you.

JOHNNY [*off*]. Very well, Mummie. [*Enters.*] Oh, Mummie, I've found such a lot of rabbits. You must

come and see them. [*Seeing* MONTY *for the first time, stares at him.*] Oh!

MONTY. Come here, youngster. Come and let me look at you. [JOHNNY *goes to him slowly.* MONTY, *grasping both hands, draws him to him, looking at him long and keenly.*] He's like you, Janet.

JANET. Is he?

MONTY. Yes. He has your eyes. So your name's Johnny, young man?

JOHNNY. Yes.

MONTY. Well, Johnny, will you give me a kiss? [MONTY *leans forward. He does so.*] That's right.

JOHNNY. And now, Mummie, come and look at my rabbits.

JANET. Not yet, dear. Mother's busy just now.

JOHNNY. May I go back to them, then?

JANET. Yes.

MONTY. Suppose I won't let you go?

JOHNNY. I'll make you—and so will Mummie.

MONTY. Plucky little chap. Off with you.

[*Kisses him again, then releases his hands.* JOHNNY *trots off again.* MONTY *follows him with his eyes. Pause.*]

JANET. Well, Monty, what do you think of him?

MONTY [*enthusiastic*]. I think he's *splendid.*

JANET [*proudly*]. Isn't he? And such a sturdy little boy. He weighed ten pounds before he was a month old.

MONTY [*shyly*]. I say, Janet.

JANET. Yes?

MONTY [*hesitates*]. You'll let me kiss you once more, won't you? For the last time? . . . [*She hesitates.*] You don't mind?

JANET [*heartily*]. Of course not, Monty. You're not *married* yet, you know.

MONTY. Janet! My dear, dear Janet!

[*Seizes her and kisses her fiercely.*

JANET [*releasing herself gently*]. That's enough, Monty.

MONTY [*remorsefully*]. I'm afraid I behaved like an awful brute to you, Janet.

JANET [*lightly*]. Oh, no.

MONTY. Yes, I did. I ought to have married you. I ought to marry you still. On account of the boy.

JANET [*quite matter-of-fact*]. Oh, well, you can't do that now in any case, can you—as you're engaged to Bertha Aldenham?

MONTY. You've heard about that? Who told you?

JANET. A worthy lady called Miss Deanes.

MONTY. I know. A regular sickener.

JANET. My dear Monty!

MONTY. Sorry.

JANET. She brought the good news. The very day I arrived as it happened. We've hardly talked of anything else at the Manor House since—except father's illness, of course.

MONTY. Why?

JANET. What else is there to talk about—in Brendon?

MONTY. That's true. Isn't it . . . [*Stops himself, looks at watch. Whistles.*] Whew! [*Rises.*

JANET. What is it, Monty?

MONTY. I say, Janet, I wonder if you'd mind going now?

JANET. Why? [*She rises too.*

MONTY [*awkwardly*]. Well, the fact is I'm expecting some one here directly. I . . .

JANET. Bertha?

MONTY. Yes. I was to meet her here at the stile at six.

JANET. *Our* stile, Monty?

MONTY. Yes. . . . You don't mind, do you—about my asking you to go, I mean?

JANET [*sitting again*]. Not in the least.

MONTY. But you're not going?

JANET. Why should I go?

MONTY. Oh, well, I thought . . .

JANET. That it wouldn't be quite suitable for us to meet?

MONTY. I didn't mean that, of course. But I thought you mightn't like—I mean it might be painful . . .

[*Sits again.*

JANET. For me to see her? On the contrary, I'm dying to see her.

MONTY. Janet, sometimes I think you're not quite human.

JANET. My dear boy, I'm extremely human—and therefore curious. [*Pause.*] What's she like, Monty? Now, I mean. She promised to be pretty.

MONTY. She is pretty, I suppose. [*Pause.*] I wonder if Bertha and I will ever have a son like Johnny!

JANET. Let's hope so, Monty. For Bertha's sake.

MONTY. Isn't that some one coming? [*Pause, listens.*] I expect it's she. [*Rising hastily and advancing towards stile.*] Is that you, Bertha?

BERTHA [*at stile*]. Oh! There you are. Yes. Isn't it hot? [*Entering the gate which he opens for her.*] Am I punctual? [*With a cry.*] Janet! When did *you* come home? [*Goes to her eagerly.*

JANET [*shaking hands*]. Only three days ago.

[BERTHA *kisses her.*]

BERTHA. *Only* three days! And you've never been up to see us.

JANET. I know. But with father ill . . .

BERTHA. Of course. I understand. I was only joking. How is Mr. De Mullin?

JANET. Much better. Not well yet, of course. But he gets stronger every day.

BERTHA. I'm so glad. I say, Janet, do you remember when you used to teach us French?

JANET. Yes.

BERTHA. I was awfully troublesome, I remember.

MONTY. I expect you were an awful duffer at it, too, Bertha.

BERTHA. What cheek!

MONTY. Wasn't she, Ja—[*pulls himself up*]—Miss De Mullin?

[JANET *smiles nervously.*]

BERTHA. I didn't know you'd met Janet, Monty?

MONTY. Oh, yes.

BERTHA. Why didn't you tell us?

[*Quite unsuspicious of anything wrong. Merely curious.*

MONTY. It was some time ago.

BERTHA [*surprised*]. Not at Brendon? You've never been at Brendon before.

MONTY. No. It was at Weymouth. I was there getting over typhoid years ago.

BERTHA. I remember, you told me. Eight or nine years ago, wasn't it?

MONTY. Yes. [*Looks at watch.*] I say, Bertha, we must be off if we're not to be late.

BERTHA. Give me two minutes to rest. The weather's simply stifling.

MONTY. Rot! It's quite cool.

BERTHA. Then you must have been sitting here a long time. I've been walking along a dusty road and I'm not going to start yet. Besides I want to know all about you two meeting. Were you staying at Weymouth, Janet?

JANET. Oh, no. I just bicycled over. Mr. Bulstead ran into me.

MONTY. I like that. She ran into *me*.

JANET. Anyhow my front wheel buckled and he had to help me to put it right.

BERTHA. What gallantry!

MONTY. It was. The beastly thing took about half

an hour. By the time it was over we seemed to have known each other for a lifetime. [*Looks at watch.*] Two minutes is up. Time to start, Bertha.

BERTHA. It isn't.

MONTY. It is. You'll be late for dressing to a certainty if you don't go.

BERTHA. I like that. I can dress as quickly as you if it comes to that.

MONTY. Oh, no. I can dress in ten minutes. I'll give you a quarter of an hour's start and be down in the drawing-room five minutes before you're ready. Is it a bet?

BERTHA. Done. In sixpences. [*To* JANET.] I'm staying at the Park for a few days longer, Janet. Come up and see me, won't you?

JANET [*uncomfortably*]. I'm afraid I can't promise. On account of father.

BERTHA. Well, after I've gone home then. Mother will want to see you. And so will Helen. And now, I suppose, I really must go. Come along, Monty.

MONTY. Not I. I needn't go for a quarter of an hour. You have a quarter of an hour's start.

BERTHA. All right. Good-bye, Janet. [*Kisses her.*] You won't forget about coming as soon as you can? I go back home on Thursday.

JANET. I won't forget.

[BERTHA *goes off through the wood.* JANET *watches her go, and there is a pause.*]

Yes, she *is* pretty, Monty. Very pretty.

MONTY [*nods*]. You don't mind?

JANET. Her being pretty? Of course not. It's a justification.

MONTY. A justification?

JANET. For forgetting me.

MONTY [*impulsively, seizing her hands*]. Janet, I've never done that. You know I haven't.

JANET [*drawing back*]. No, Monty. Not again.

[*Pause.*

MONTY. I say, I as nearly as possible called you Janet right out before Bertha.

JANET. So I saw. You *did* call me Miss De Mullin, by the way—which wasn't very clever of you.

MONTY. Did I? What an ass I am! But I don't suppose she noticed.

JANET. I dare say not. [*A shrill cry comes from the wood on the right. Then silence.* JANET *starts up.*] What was that?

MONTY. I don't know.

JANET. It sounded like a child. Where did it come from? Over here, didn't it?

MONTY. I think so.

JANET [*alarmed*]. I hope Johnny . . . I must go and see. . . .

[*A moment later* JOHNNY *runs in sobbing, followed by* MRS. DE MULLIN *and* BERTHA.]

Johnny! What is it, my sweetheart? [*Runs to him.*

JOHNNY. Oh, Mummie, Mummie, I was running after the rabbits and I tripped over some nettles and they stung me.

MRS. DE MULLIN. He put his foot in a hole, Janet. He fell just as I met Bertha. [*Shakes hands with* MONTY.] How do you do, Mr. Bulstead?

JANET. There! There! my pet. Did it hurt very much? Mother shall kiss it and make it well. [*Does so.*

JOHNNY [*sobs*]. Oh-h-h——

BERTHA. Is he your son?

JANET. Yes. Don't cry any more, dear. Brave boys don't cry, you know.

JOHNNY [*gasps*]. It h-hurts so.

JANET. I know. But crying won't make it hurt less, will it? So you must dry your eyes. Come now.

JOHNNY. All right, Mummie. [*Still sobs gradually.*

BERTHA [*astonished*]. I'd no idea you were married, Janet.

JANET. Hadn't you?

BERTHA. No. When was it?

JANET. Eight years ago. Nearly nine. To Mr. Seagrave.

BERTHA. Is he down here with you?

JANET. No. My husband died soon after our marriage.

BERTHA. Poor Janet. I'm so sorry. [*Pause.*] And it was before your marriage that Monty met you?

JANET. How do you know?

BERTHA [*quite unsuspicious*]. He called you Miss De Mullin.

JANET. Of course.

MRS. DE MULLIN [*pricking up her ears suspiciously at this*]. I didn't know you had met my daughter before, Mr. Bulstead.

BERTHA. Nor did I. They met down at Weymouth quite by chance eight or nine years ago.

MRS. DE MULLIN [*gravely*]. Indeed?

MONTY. Yes. . . . I say, Bertha, excuse my interrupting you, but we really must be off now if we're not to be late.

BERTHA. You want to win that bet!

MONTY. The bet's off. There's no time to give you any start. I must come, too, or I shan't be in time myself, and the Governor will simply curse.

BERTHA. Is Mr. Bulstead *very* fierce if people are late for dinner?

MONTY. Simply beastly.

BERTHA. How very unpleasant! I wonder if I'm wise to marry into the family?

[*Shaking hands with* MRS. DE MULLIN *and* JANET. *Then goes off laughing merrily.*]

MONTY [*sardonically*]. I wonder. [*Shakes hands with* MRS. DE MULLIN *and* JANET.] Will you give me a kiss, old chap. [*To* JOHNNY.

JOHNNY. That's three times.

[MONTY *nods.* MONTY *follows* BERTHA *off. A long pause.* MRS. DE MULLIN *looks fixedly at* JANET. JANET *looks at the ground.*]

MRS. DE MULLIN [*slowly*]. Mr. Montague Bulstead seems unusually fond of children, Janet.

JANET. Does he, mother? [*She does not look up.*

MRS. DE MULLIN. Yes. Johnny is rather old to be kissed by strangers.

JANET. I suppose he kissed him because he was brave about being stung.

MRS. DE MULLIN. He seems to have kissed him before. Twice.

JANET. I dare say. I didn't notice.

MRS. DE MULLIN. Johnny did, apparently.

JANET. Well, it doesn't matter anyway, does it? [*Looks up defiantly. Meets her mother's eyes full on her.*] Why do you look at me like that, mother?

MRS. DE MULLIN. Send Johnny away for a little, Janet. I want to speak to you.

JANET. I'd rather not, mother. He might hurt himself again.

MRS. DE MULLIN. He will be quite safe. Run away, Johnny. But don't go too far.

JOHNNY. All right, grandmother.

[JOHNNY *trots off into the wood. Pause.*

JANET [*defiantly*]. Well, mother?

MRS. DE MULLIN. Janet, why did you never tell us you had met Mr. Bulstead before?

JANET. When?

MRS. DE MULLIN. Any time during the last three days, when we were speaking of his engagement.

JANET. I'd forgotten all about it, mother.

MRS. DE MULLIN. Indeed? And why didn't you tell us eight years ago, when you met him at Weymouth, when you were still "Miss De Mullin"?

JANET. Mother, don't badger me like this. If you want to ask me anything ask it.

MRS. DE MULLIN. Janet, Mr. Bulstead is Johnny's father.

JANET. Mr. Bulstead? Absurd!

MRS. DE MULLIN. Then why did you pretend not to have met him? Why did you conceal the fact of your meeting him from us eight years ago? And why has he concealed the fact from Bertha and the Bulsteads? [*Pause.*

JANET [*resignedly*]. Very well, mother, if you're determined to know you must know. Yes, he's Johnny's father.

MRS. DE MULLIN. Oh, Janet!

JANET [*irritably*]. Well, mother, if you didn't want to know you shouldn't have asked. I told you not to worry me.

[MRS. DE MULLIN *begins to cry.*]

[*Remorsefully.*] There, there, mother! Don't cry. I'm sorry I was cross to you. Don't let's talk any more about it.

MRS. DE MULLIN [*snuffling*]. No, Janet, we *must* talk about it. There's no use trying to hide things any longer. You must tell me the truth.

JANET. Much better not, mother. It won't give you any pleasure to hear.

MRS. DE MULLIN. Still, I'd rather know, Janet.

JANET [*shrugs*]. As you please. What do you want me to tell you?

MRS. DE MULLIN. Everything. How did you come to be at Weymouth? I don't remember your staying at Weymouth eight years ago.

JANET. I wasn't staying there. But Monty was.

MRS. DE MULLIN [*shocked*]. Monty!

JANET. Mr. Bulstead. Oh, what *does* it matter now? He'd had typhoid and was there to recruit. I'd ridden over on my bicycle . . .

MRS. DE MULLIN [*lamentably*]. Bicycle! I always said it was all through bicycling.

JANET [*another shrug*]. He ran into me, or I ran into him. I was rather shaken, and he asked me to come in and rest. It happened close to the house where he was lodging.

MRS. DE MULLIN. You went in! To his lodgings! A man you had never met before!

JANET. My dear mother, when you have been thrown off a bicycle, ordinary conventions cease to apply. Besides, as a matter of fact, we *had* met once before—the day before, in fact.

MRS. DE MULLIN. Where?

JANET. Here. By this very stile. Monty was riding past and he asked me the way to somewhere—Thoresby, I think. I was standing by the stile. Next day I happened to ride into Weymouth. We collided—and the rest you know.

MRS. DE MULLIN [*sternly*]. Were those the *only* times you met him, Janet?

JANET. Of course not, mother. After the Weymouth collision we met constantly, nearly every day. We used to meet out riding, and I had tea with him lots of times in his rooms.

MRS. DE MULLIN [*horrified*]. How long did this go on?

JANET. More than a month—till he left Weymouth, in fact. Now, mother, is that all you want to know? Because if so we'll drop the subject.

MRS. DE MULLIN. Oh, Janet, what *will* your father say?

JANET. Father? He won't know.

MRS. DE MULLIN. Won't know? But I must tell him.

JANET. Good heavens! Why?

MRS. DE MULLIN. In order that Mr. Bulstead may marry you, of course. Your father will insist on his marrying you.

JANET. If father attempts to do that, mother, I shall deny the whole story. And Monty will back me up.

MRS. DE MULLIN. He would never be so wicked.

JANET. He would have to if I ask him. It's the least he could do.

MRS. DE MULLIN. Johnny is there to prove it.

JANET. There's nothing to prove that Monty is Johnny's father. Nothing whatever.

MRS. DE MULLIN. But, Janet, *why* won't you marry him?

JANET [*impatiently*]. My dear mother, because I don't want to, of course.

MRS. DE MULLIN. You don't *want* to?

JANET. Great heavens, no! Why should I? Monty Bulstead isn't at all the sort of man I should care to *marry*.

MRS. DE MULLIN. Why not?

JANET. Frankly, mother, because he's not interesting enough. Monty's a very nice fellow and I like him very much, but I don't want to pass the remainder of my life with him. If I'm to marry anybody—and I don't think I shall—it will have to be a rather more remarkable person than Monty Bulstead.

MRS. DE MULLIN. Yet you *did* love him, Janet. You must have loved him . . . then.

JANET. Oh, yes. Then. But that was ages ago, before Johnny was born. After that I didn't care for anybody any more except Johnny.

MRS. DE MULLIN. But, Janet, you *ought* to marry him, for Johnny's sake.

JANET. Too late, mother. That should have been eight years ago to be any use.

MRS. DE MULLIN. Better too late than not at all.

JANET. Better not at all than too late.

MRS. DE MULLIN. He seduced you, Janet.

JANET [*thoughtfully*]. Did he? I was twenty-seven. He was twenty. If either of us was to blame, wasn't it I?

MRS. DE MULLIN. Janet, you're trying to screen him.

JANET. Dearest mother, you talk like a sentimental novel.

MRS. DE MULLIN [*indignantly*]. And he's to be allowed to marry Bertha Aldenham, just as if this had never happened?

JANET. Why not? It's not *her* fault, is it? And girls find it difficult enough to get married nowadays, goodness knows.

MRS. DE MULLIN. Still, she *ought* to be told, Janet. I think she *must* be told.

JANET. My dear mother, if *she* knows everybody will know, and the scandal will make all the dead and gone De Mullins turn in their graves. As for father, it would simply kill him out of hand.

MRS. DE MULLIN [*sadly*]. Poor father!

JANET [*briskly*]. So, on the whole, I don't think we'll tell anyone. Come, mother, it's time we started. [*More kindly.*] Poor mother. Don't fret. Perhaps Hester will have some news to cheer you when we get home.

MRS. DE MULLIN. Hester?

JANET [*rallying her*]. An engagement, mother. Hester's engagement. Hester and Mr. Brown have been decorating the church for the last *four* hours. What an opportunity for a declaration! Or don't people propose in church?

MRS. DE MULLIN. Janet, how can you laugh after what has happened?

JANET. Laugh? Of course I can laugh. What else is there to do? Let's go home. Johnny! Johnny!

[*Calls. By this time twilight is falling. A full moon has begun to rise, lighting up the scene.*]

JOHNNY [*off*]. Yes, Mummie.

JANET. Come along, dear. Mother's going to start.

JOHNNY [*off*]. All right, Mummie. [*Entering.*] Oh, Mummie, you've not seen my rabbits yet!

JANET. No. It's too dark to-night. Mother must come and see them another time.

JOHNNY. You won't forget, will you, Mummie? [*Looking at* MRS. DE MULLIN.] Grandmother, you've been crying. Is that because I stung myself with a nettle?

JANET. Little egoist! Of course it is. Give your grandmother a kiss and we'll all walk home together.

[MRS. DE MULLIN *stoops and kisses* JOHNNY *passionately. They go off through the gate and the curtain falls.*]

ACT III

Five days have passed since Act II

SCENE.—*As in Act I. Time, late afternoon. When the curtain rises* MRS. CLOUSTON, MRS. DE MULLIN *and* JANET *are on the stage. The nervous tension of the last few days has clearly told on* JANET, *who looks feverish and irritable.*

MRS. DE MULLIN [*speaking off into the outer hall*]. Good-bye ! Good-bye !

JANET [*who is standing in the middle of the hall, scornfully*]. Good-bye ! Good-bye !

MRS. CLOUSTON [*shocked*]. Janet !

JANET [*fiercely*]. How many times a week does that Bulstead woman think it necessary to call on us ?

MRS. CLOUSTON [*sitting*]. She doesn't call very often.

JANET. She's been three times this week.

MRS. DE MULLIN [*closing door*]. Naturally she wants to hear how your father is, dear.

JANET [*irritably*]. My dear mother, what *can* it matter to Mrs. Bulstead whether father lives or dies ?

MRS. DE MULLIN. Janet !

JANET [*exasperated*]. Well, mother, do you seriously believe she cares ? Or Miss Deanes ? Or Miss Rolt ? Or any of these people ? They only call because they've nothing better to do. It's sheer mental vacuity on their part. Besides, father's perfectly well now. They know that. But they go on *calling, calling !* I wonder Miss Deanes doesn't bring her cockatoo to inquire.

[*Tramps to and fro impatiently.*

MRS. CLOUSTON. Really, Janet, I can't think what's

the matter with you. Do sit down and try and exercise some self-control.

JANET. I've no self-control where these Brendon people are concerned. They get on my nerves, every one of them. . . . Where's Johnny?

MRS. DE MULLIN. In the garden, I think.

JANET. Sensible boy! He's had enough of visitors for one day, I'll be bound. I'll go out and join him.

[*Goes out angrily.*

MRS. CLOUSTON. I can't think what's come to Janet the last day or two. Her temper gets worse and worse.

MRS. DE MULLIN. Perhaps it's only the hot weather. No De Mullin——

MRS. CLOUSTON. Nonsense, Jane, don't be foolish. We can't have *Janet* giving way to that sort of thing at her age.

MRS. DE MULLIN. I'm afraid she is rather irritable just now. She flew out quite savagely at Hester to-day just after luncheon.

MRS. CLOUSTON. Why was that?

MRS. DE MULLIN. Because of something she had been teaching Johnny. The Athanasian Creed I think it was. Yes, it must have been that because Johnny asked Janet what was meant by three Incomprehensibles. Janet asked him where he had heard all that, and Johnny said Aunt Hester had taught it to him. Janet was very angry and forbade Hester ever to teach him anything again. Hester was quite hurt about it.

MRS. CLOUSTON. Naturally. Still, I do think Hester might have chosen something else to teach him.

MRS. DE MULLIN. That was what Janet said.

MRS. CLOUSTON. But that's no reason why she shouldn't behave herself when visitors are here. She was quite rude to Mrs. Bulstead. What they think of her in London when she goes on like this I can't imagine.

MRS. DE MULLIN. Perhaps she isn't like this in London.

MRS. CLOUSTON. Of course she is, Jane. Worse. Here she has the restraining influences of home life. Whereas in London, living alone as she does . . .

MRS. DE MULLIN. She has Johnny !

MRS. CLOUSTON. She has Johnny, of course. But that's not enough. She ought to have a husband to look after her.

MRS. DE MULLIN [*sighs*]. Yes.

[*Seats herself slowly beside her sister.*

MRS. CLOUSTON. Where's Hester ?

MRS. DE MULLIN. At church, I expect.

MRS. CLOUSTON. Church ! Why, the girl's always at church.

MRS. DE MULLIN. It's a Wednesday. And it does no harm, I think.

MRS. CLOUSTON. Let us hope not, Jane.

[DE MULLIN *enters by the door on the left. He has evidently got over his recent attack and looks comparatively hale and vigorous.*]

MRS. DE MULLIN. Have you had your nap, Hugo ?

DE MULLIN. Yes. The sunset woke me, I suppose. It was shining full on my face.

MRS. DE MULLIN. What a pity it woke you.

DE MULLIN. It didn't matter. I've slept enough. . . . [*Wanders towards sofa.*] Where's Johnny ?

MRS. DE MULLIN. In the garden, I think, with Janet.

DE MULLIN [*wanders to window and looks out*]. Yes. There he is. He's playing hide-and-seek with Ellen. . . . Now she's caught him. No, he's got away. Bravo, Johnny ! [*Stands watching intently for a while. Then turns and comes down.*] What a fine little fellow it is ! A true De Mullin !

MRS. DE MULLIN. Do you think so, Hugo ?

DE MULLIN. Every inch of him ! [*Pause, sits, half to himself.*] If only Janet had been married !

MRS. DE MULLIN [*sighs*]. Yes.

DE MULLIN [*musing*]. I wonder who the father really was. [*Looking up.*] She has never told you, Jane, I suppose?

MRS. DE MULLIN [*steadily, without looking up*]. No, Hugo.

MRS. CLOUSTON. And never will. Nobody was ever so obstinate as Janet.

DE MULLIN [*nods sadly*]. Janet always had plenty of will.

MRS. CLOUSTON. Far too much! [*Pause.*

MRS. DE MULLIN. You'll quite miss Johnny when he goes away from us, won't you, Hugo?

DE MULLIN. Yes. I never thought I could grow so fond of a child. The house will seem empty without him.

MRS. DE MULLIN. I shall miss him too.

DE MULLIN. We shall all miss him. [*Pause. Thoughtfully.*] I wonder if Janet would leave him with us when she goes back to London?

MRS. DE MULLIN. Leave him with us? Altogether, you mean?

DE MULLIN. Yes.

MRS. DE MULLIN. I'm afraid not, Hugo. In fact, I'm quite sure she would not. She's so fond of Johnny.

DE MULLIN. I suppose she wouldn't. [*Pause.*] I was greatly shocked at what you told me about her the other day, Harriet.

MRS. CLOUSTON. About her keeping a shop, you mean?

DE MULLIN. Yes. And going into partnership with a Miss Higgs or Hicks. It all sounds most discreditable.

MRS. CLOUSTON. Deplorable.

MRS. DE MULLIN [*meekly*]. She had to do something to keep herself, Hugo.

DE MULLIN. No doubt. Still, it can't be considered a proper sort of position for my daughter. I think she must give it up at once.

MRS. DE MULLIN. She would only have to take to something else.

DE MULLIN. Not necessarily. She might come back here to live with us . . . with Johnny, of course.

MRS. DE MULLIN [*astonished*]. *Live* with us?

DE MULLIN. Why not, Jane?

MRS. DE MULLIN. Well, of course, if *you* think so, Hugo.

MRS. CLOUSTON. Are you sure you will like to have Janet living at home again, Hugo?

DE MULLIN. I think it might be the best arrangement. And I shall like to have Johnny here. He's our only descendant, Harriet, the last of the De Mullins. If you or Jane had had a son it would be different.

MRS. CLOUSTON [*sighs*]. Yes.

DE MULLIN. As it is I don't see how we can do anything better than have them both down here—as Jane doesn't think Janet would part with Johnny. It would be better for Janet, too. It would take her away from her present unsatisfactory surroundings. It would give her a position and independence—everything she now lacks.

MRS. DE MULLIN. I should have thought she was *independent* now, Hugo.

DE MULLIN [*irritably*]. My dear Jane, how can a woman possibly be independent whose income comes out of selling hats? The only form of independence that is possible or desirable for a woman is that she shall be dependent upon her husband or, if she is unmarried, on her nearest male relative. I am sure *you* agree with me, Harriet?

MRS. CLOUSTON. Quite, Hugo.

DE MULLIN. Very well. I will speak to her about it at once.

MRS. DE MULLIN [*nervously*]. I hardly think I would say anything about it to-day, Hugo.

DE MULLIN. Why not, Jane?

MRS. DE MULLIN. Well, she seems nervous and irritable

to-day. I think I should put it off for a day or two.

DE MULLIN [*testily*]. My dear Jane, you are always procrastinating. If such an arrangement is to be made the sooner it is made the better. [*Goes to window and calls.*] Janet, my dear! Janet!

[*Pause. Then* JANET *appears at centre window.*

JANET. Did you call me, father?

DE MULLIN. Yes. Come to me for a moment. I want to speak to you. [DE MULLIN *wanders undecidedly to the fire-place. A moment later* JANET *enters from the garden.*] Is Johnny with you?

JANET. No. He's having tea with Ellen. I said he might. [*Pause.* JANET *comes down.*

DE MULLIN. Janet, your mother and I have been talking over your future.

JANET. Have you, father?

[*With a quick glance at her mother.* MRS. DE MULLIN, *however, makes no sign.*]

DE MULLIN. Yes. We have come to the conclusion that it would be better for you to come back here to live.

[JANET *faces round towards her father.*]

JANET. But what would become of the business?

DE MULLIN. You will have to give up the business, of course. So much the better. You never ought to have gone into it. It was not at all a suitable occupation for you.

JANET. But I like it, father.

MRS. CLOUSTON. *Like* it! A De Mullin *like* keeping a shop! Impossible.

JANET [*firmly*]. Yes, Aunt Harriet, I like it. And I'm proud of it.

DE MULLIN [*sharply*]. Nonsense, Janet. Nobody can possibly be proud of keeping a shop.

JANET. *I* am. I made it, you see. It's my child, like Johnny.

DE MULLIN [*amazed*]. Janet! Do you understand

what you're doing? I offer you the chance of returning to Brendon to live as my daughter.

JANET [*indifferently*]. I quite understand, father. And I'm much obliged for the offer. Only I decline it. That's all.

MRS. CLOUSTON. Really!

DE MULLIN [*with dignity*]. The question is, are you to be allowed to decline it, in Johnny's interests if not your own?

JANET. Johnny's?

DE MULLIN. Yes. Johnny's. As long as he was a child it made little difference where he was brought up. Relatively little that is. Now he is getting to an age when early associations are all-important. Living here at Brendon in the home of his ancestors he will grow up worthy of the race from which he is descended. He will be a true De Mullin.

JANET [*quietly*]. Perhaps I don't want him to be a true De Mullin, father.

DE MULLIN. What do you mean?

JANET. My dear father, you're infatuated about your De Mullins. Who are the De Mullins after all? Mere country squires who lived on here down at Brendon generation after generation. What have they ever done that I should want Johnny to be like them? Nothing. There's not one of them who has ever distinguished himself in the smallest degree or made his name known outside his native village. The De Mullins are, and have always been, nobodies. Look at their portraits. Is there a single one of them that is worth a second glance? Why, they never even had the brains to be painted by a decent artist. With the result that they aren't worth the canvas they're painted on. Or is it board? I'd make a bonfire of them if they were mine.

MRS. DE MULLIN. Janet!

JANET [*impatiently*]. I would. You seem to think

there's some peculiar virtue about always living in the same place. I believe in people uprooting themselves and doing something with their lives. What was the good of the De Mullins going on living down here century after century, always a little poorer, and a little poorer, selling a farm here, mortgaging another there, instead of going out into the world to seek their fortunes? We've stayed too long in one place, we De Mullins. We shall never be worth anything sleeping away our lives down at Brendon.

DE MULLIN [*sharply*]. Janet, you are talking foolishly. What you say only makes it clearer to me that you cannot be allowed to live by yourself in London any longer. Such a life is demoralising to you. You must come back to Brendon.

JANET. I shall not come back to Brendon, father. On that I am quite determined.

DE MULLIN [*with dignity*]. My dear, this is not a matter that rests with you. My mind is made up. Hitherto I have only asked you to return. Do not force me to command you.

JANET [*fiercely*]. Command? By what right do you command?

DE MULLIN. By the right of a father, Janet. By that right I insist on your obedience.

JANET [*losing her temper*]. Obedience! Obedience! I owe no one obedience. I am of full age and can order my life as I please. Is a woman never to be considered old enough to manage her own affairs? Is she to go down to her grave everlastingly under tutelage? Is she always to be obeying a father when she's not obeying a husband? Well, I for one will not submit to such nonsense. I'm sick of this everlasting *obedience*.

DE MULLIN [*fiercely*]. Janet! . . .

[*Door opens on the left.* ELLEN *enters with the lamp. There is a considerable pause, during which* ELLEN *puts*

down the lamp, turns it up, pulls down the blind and begins to draw the curtains. In the middle of the last process DE MULLIN *intervenes.*]

DE MULLIN [*irritably*]. You can leave the curtains, Ellen.

ELLEN. Very well, sir.

[*Exit* ELLEN *with maddening deliberation. Pause.*]

JANET. Father, I'm sorry if what I said vexed you. Perhaps I spoke too strongly.

DE MULLIN [*with great dignity*]. Very well, Janet. You will remain with us.

JANET. No, father, that's not possible. For Johnny's sake, as well as my own, it would be madness for us to live down here.

DE MULLIN. For Johnny's sake?

JANET. Yes, Johnny's. In London we're not known, he and I. There he's simply Johnny Seagrave, the son of a respectable widow who keeps a hat-shop. Here he is the son of Janet De Mullin who ran away from home one night eight years ago and whose name was never mentioned again by her parents until one fine day she turned up with an eight-year-old boy and said she was married. How long would they take to see through *that* story down here, do you think?

MRS. CLOUSTON [*tartly*]. Whose fault is that?

JANET. Never mind whose fault it is, Aunt Harriet. The question is, will they see through it or will they not? Of course they *know* nothing so far, but I've no doubt they suspect. What else have people to do down here but suspect other people? Miss Deanes murmurs her doubts to Mrs. Bulstead and Mrs. Bulstead shakes her head to Miss Deanes. Mrs. Bulstead! What right has *she* to look down that huge nose of hers at *me!* She's had *ten* children!

MRS. DE MULLIN. Janet! She's married.

JANET. To Mr. Bulstead! That vulgar animal! You don't ask me to consider that a *merit*, do you? No, Mrs. Bulstead shan't have the chance of sneering at Johnny if *I* can help it. Or at me either.

MRS. DE MULLIN. Janet, listen to me. You don't understand how your father feels about this or how much it means to him. Johnny is his only grandchild—our only descendant. He would adopt him and call him De Mullin, and then the name would not die out. You know how much your father thinks of that and how sorry he has always been that I never had a son.

JANET [*more gently*]. I know, mother. But when Hester marries . . .

DE MULLIN. Hester?

JANET. Yes.

DE MULLIN [*turning angrily to his wife*]. But whom is Hester going to marry? *Is* she going to marry? I have heard nothing about this. What's this, Jane? Has something been kept from me?

MRS. DE MULLIN. No, no, Hugo. Nothing has been kept from you. It's only some fancy of Janet's. She thinks Mr. Brown is going to propose to Hester. There's nothing in it, really.

DE MULLIN. Mr. Brown! Impossible!

MRS. CLOUSTON. Quite impossible!

JANET [*calmly*]. Why impossible, father?

DE MULLIN. He would never dare to do such a thing. *Mr. Brown* to have the audacity to propose to *my* daughter!

JANET [*quietly*]. Why not, father?

DE MULLIN [*bubbling with rage*]. Because he is not of a suitable position. Because the *De Mullins* cannot be expected to marry people of *that* class. Because . . .

JANET [*shrugs*]. I dare say Mr. Brown won't think of all that. Anyhow, I hope he won't. I hope he'll propose to Hester and she'll accept him, and then when they've a

whole herd of little Browns you can select one of them and make a De Mullin of him, poor little wretch.

[*At this moment* HESTER *enters from the garden. An uncomfortable silence falls.*]

MRS. DE MULLIN. Hush, hush, Janet. Here is Hester. Is that you, Hester? Have you come from church?

HESTER. Yes, mother.

[*She comes down, her face looking pale and drawn, and stands by her mother.*]

MRS. DE MULLIN. You're very late, dear.

HESTER. A little. I stayed on after service was over.

MRS. CLOUSTON. How very eccentric of you!

HESTER [*quietly*]. I suppose saying one's prayers does seem eccentric to you, Aunt Harriet.

MRS. CLOUSTON. My dear Hester, considering you'd only just finished *one* service . . .

JANET [*who has not noticed the look on her sister's face*]. Well, Aunt Harriet, who was right?

MRS. DE MULLIN. Hush, Janet!

JANET [*gaily*]. My dear mother, what on earth is there to "hush" about? And what on earth is there to keep Hester in church half an hour after service is over, if it's not what I told you?

HESTER. What do you mean?

JANET. Nothing, dear. Come and give me a kiss.

[*Pulling her towards her.*

HESTER [*repulsing her roughly*]. I won't. Leave me alone, Janet. What has she been saying about me, mother? I insist on knowing.

MRS. DE MULLIN. Nothing, dear. Only some nonsense about you and Mr. Brown. Janet is always talking nonsense.

JANET. Yes, Hester. About you and Mr. Brown. *Your* Mr. Brown. Confess he has asked you to marry him, as I said?

HESTER [*slowly*]. Mr. Brown is engaged to be married to Agatha Bulstead. He told me so this evening after service.

JANET. He told you !

HESTER. Yes. He asked me to congratulate him.

JANET. The little wretch !

MRS. DE MULLIN. To Agatha Bulstead ? That's the plain one, isn't it ?

HESTER. The third one. Yes.

JANET. The plain one ! Good heavens, it oughtn't to be allowed. The children will be little monsters.

MRS. CLOUSTON. So that's why you were so long at church ?

HESTER. Yes. I was praying that they might be happy.

JANET. Poor Hester !

MRS. DE MULLIN. Are you disappointed, dear ?

HESTER. I'd rather not talk about it if you don't mind, mother.

MRS. DE MULLIN. Your father would never have given his consent.

HESTER. So Mr. Brown said.

JANET. The little *worm.*

MRS. DE MULLIN. My dear !

JANET. Well, mother, isn't it too contemptible ?

DE MULLIN. I'm bound to say Mr. Brown seems to have behaved in a very fitting manner.

JANET. You think so, father ?

DE MULLIN. Certainly. He saw what my objections would be and recognised that they were reasonable. Nothing could be more proper.

JANET. Well, father, I don't know what you do want. Ten minutes ago you were supposed to be wanting a grandson to adopt. Here's Hester going the right way to provide one, and you don't like that either.

HESTER. What is all this about, father ? What have you all been discussing while I've been out ?

MRS. DE MULLIN. It was nothing about you, Hester.

HESTER. I'm not sure of that, mother. Anyhow I should like to hear what it was.

MRS. CLOUSTON. Hester, that is not at all a proper tone to use in speaking to your mother.

HESTER [*fiercely*]. Please don't interfere, Aunt Harriet. I suppose I can be trusted to speak to my mother properly by this time.

MRS. CLOUSTON. You certainly ought to, my dear. You are quite old enough.

HESTER. Very well, then. Perhaps you will be good enough not to dictate to me in future. What was it you were discussing, father?

JANET. I'll tell you, Hester. Father wanted to adopt Johnny. He wanted me to come down here to live altogether.

HESTER. Indeed? Well, father, understand, please, that if Janet comes down here to live, *I go!*

MRS. DE MULLIN. Hester!

HESTER. I will not live in the same house with Janet. Nothing shall induce me. I would rather beg my bread.

JANET. That settles it then. Thanks, Hester. I'm glad you had the pluck to say that. You are right. Quite right.

HESTER. I can do without *your* approval, Janet.

JANET [*recklessly*]. Of course you can. But you can have it all the same. You never wanted me down here. You always disapproved of my being sent for. I ought never to have come. I wish I hadn't come. My coming has only done harm to Hester, as she knew it would.

DE MULLIN. How harm?

JANET. Mr. Brown would have asked Hester to marry him if I hadn't come. He meant to; I'm sure of it.

MRS. DE MULLIN. But he said . . .

JANET. I know. But that was only an excuse. Young men aren't so considerate of their future fathers-in-law as

all that nowadays. No. Mr. Brown heard some story about me from Miss Deanes. Or perhaps the Vicar put him on his guard. Isn't it so, Hester?

[HESTER *nods.*]

MRS. DE MULLIN. But as your father would never have consented, dear . . .

HESTER [*slowly*]. Still, I'd rather he had asked me, mother.

JANET. Quite right, Hester! I'm glad you've got some wholesome feminine vanity left in your composition. And you'd have said "yes," like a sensible woman.

HESTER. Oh, you're always sneering!

JANET. Yes. But I'm *going*, Hester, *going! That's* the great thing. Keep your eyes fixed steadily on that and you'll be able to bear anything else. That reminds me. [*Goes to door and calls loudly into the hall.*] Johnny! Johnny!

MRS. CLOUSTON. Really, Janet!

JANET. Oh, I forgot. It's not genteel to call into the passage, is it? I ought to have rung. I apologise, Aunt Harriet. [*Calls again.*] Johnny!

MRS. DE MULLIN. Why are you calling Johnny?

JANET. To tell him to put on his hat and coat, mother dear. I'm going to the station.

DE MULLIN. You're going to-night?

JANET. Yes, father, to-night. I've done harm enough down here. I'm going away.

JOHNNY [*entering*]. Do you want me, Mummie?

JANET. Yes. Run and put on your things and say good-bye to Cook and Ellen and tell Robert to put in the pony. Mother's going back to London.

JOHNNY. Are we going now, Mummie?

JANET [*nods*]. As fast as the train can carry us. And tell Ellen to lock my trunk for me and give you the key. Run along. [*Exit* JOHNNY.

DE MULLIN. Lock your trunk! But you've not *packed?*

JANET. Oh yes, I have. Everything's packed, down to my last shoelace. I don't know how often I haven't packed and unpacked during the last five days.

MRS. DE MULLIN [*astonished and hurt*]. You meant to leave us then, Janet? You've been *wanting* to leave us all the time?

JANET. Yes, mother. I've been wanting to leave you. I can't stay here any longer. Brendon stifles me. It has too many ghosts. I suppose it's your ridiculous De Mullins.

DE MULLIN. Janet!

JANET. I know, father. That's blasphemy, isn't it? But I can't help it. I must go. I've been meaning to tell you every day for the last four days, but somehow I always put it off.

DE MULLIN. Understand me, Janet. If you leave this house to-night you leave it for ever.

JANET [*cheerfully*]. All right, father.

DE MULLIN [*growing angrier*]. Understand, too, that if you leave it you are never to hold communication with me or with anyone in it henceforward. You are cut off from the family. I will never see you or recognise you in any way, or speak to you again as long as I live.

JANET [*astonished*]. My dear father, why are you so angry? Is there anything so dreadful in my wanting to live in London instead of in the country?

DE MULLIN [*getting more and more excited*]. Why am I angry? Why am I? . . .

MRS. DE MULLIN. Sh! Hugo! You mustn't excite yourself. You know the doctor said . . .

DE MULLIN. Be quiet, Jane! [*Turning furiously to* JANET.] Why am I angry? You disgrace the family. You have a child, that poor fatherless boy . . .

JANET [*quietly*]. Oh come, I could have got along quite well without a father, if it comes to that. And so could Hester.

MRS. DE MULLIN. Janet!

JANET. Well, mother, what has father ever done for Hester or me except try and prevent us from doing something we wanted to do? Hester wanted to marry Mr. Brown. Father wouldn't have allowed her. He's not genteel enough to marry a De Mullin. I want to go back to my shop. Father objects to that. That's not genteel enough for a De Mullin either. Well, hang all the De Mullins, say I!

DE MULLIN [*furious*]. I forbid you to speak of your family in that way—of *my* family. I forbid it! It is an outrage. Your ancestors were honourable men and pure women. They did their duty in the position in which they were born, and handed on their name untarnished to their children. Hitherto our honour has been unsullied. You have sullied it. You have brought shame upon your parents and shame upon your son, and that shame you can never wipe out. If you had in you a spark of human feeling, if you were not worthless and heartless you would blush to look me in the face or your child in the face. But you are utterly hardened. I ought never to have offered to receive you back into this house. I ought never to have consented to see you again. I was wrong. I regret it. You are unfit for the society of decent people. Go back to London. Take up the wretched trade you practise there. It is what you are fit for.

JANET. That's exactly what I think, father. As we agree about it why make such a fuss?

DE MULLIN [*furious*]. Janet . . .

HESTER. Father, don't argue with her. It's no use. [*Solemnly.*] Leave her to God.

JANET. Hester, Hester, don't deceive yourself. In your heart you envy me my baby, and you know it.

HESTER [*indignant*]. I do not.

JANET. You do. Time is running on with you, my dear. You're twenty-eight. Just the age that I was when

I met my lover. Yes, my lover. In a few years you will be too old for love, too old to have children. So soon it passeth away and we are gone. Your best years are slipping by and you are growing faded and cross and peevish. Already the lines are hardening about your mouth and the hollows coming under your eyes. You will be an old woman before your time unless you marry and have children. And what will you do then? Keep a lap-dog, I suppose, or sit up at night with a sick cockatoo like Miss Deanes. Miss Deanes! Even she has a heart somewhere about her. Do you imagine she wouldn't rather give it to her babies than snivel over *poultry?* No, Hester, make good use of your youth, my dear. It won't last always. And once gone it is gone for ever. [HESTER *bursts into tears.*] There, there, Hester! I'm sorry. I oughtn't to have spoken like that. It wasn't kind. Forgive me. [HESTER *weeps more and more violently.*] Hester, don't cry like that. I can't bear to hear you. I was angry and said more than I should. I didn't mean to vex you. Come, dear, you mustn't give way like that or you'll make yourself ill. Dry your eyes and let me see you smile. [*Caressing her.* HESTER, *who has begun by resisting her feebly, gradually allows herself to be soothed.*] That's better! My dear, what a sight you've made of yourself! But all women are hideous when they've been crying. It makes their noses red, and that's dreadfully unbecoming. [HESTER *sobs out a laugh.*] No. You mustn't begin to cry again or I shall scold you. I shall, really.

HESTER [*half laughing, half crying hysterically*]. You seem to think every woman ought to behave as shamefully as you did.

JANET [*grimly*]. No, Hester. I don't think that. To do as I did needs pluck and brains—and five hundred pounds. Everything most women haven't got, poor things. So they must marry or remain childless. You must marry —the next curate. I suppose the Bulsteads will buy Mr.

Brown a living as he's marrying the plainest of the daughters. It's the least they can do. But that's no reason why *I* should marry unless I choose.

MRS. CLOUSTON. Well, I've never heard of anything so disgraceful. I thought Janet at least had the grace to be ashamed of what she did!

JANET [*genuinely astonished*]. Ashamed? Ashamed of wanting to have a child? What on earth were women created for, Aunt Harriet, if not to have children?

MRS. CLOUSTON. To *marry* and have children.

JANET [*with relentless logic*]. My dear Aunt Harriet, women had children thousands of years before marriage was invented. I dare say they will go on doing so thousands of years after it has ceased to exist.

MRS. DE MULLIN. Janet!

JANET. Well, mother, that's how I feel. And I believe it's how all wholesome women feel if they would only acknowledge it. I *wanted* to have a child. I always did from the time when I got too old to play with dolls. Not an adopted child or a child of some one else's, but a baby of my very own. Of course I wanted to marry. That's the ordinary way a woman wants to be a mother nowadays, I suppose. But time went on and nobody came forward, and I saw myself getting old and my chance slipping away. Then I met—never mind. And I fell in love with him. Or, perhaps, I only fell in love with love. I don't know. It was so splendid to find some one at last who really cared for me as women should be cared for! Not to talk to because I was clever or to play tennis with because I was strong, but to kiss me and to make love to me! Yes! To make love to me!

DE MULLIN [*solemnly*]. Listen to me, my girl. You say that now, and I dare say you believe it. But when you are older, when Johnny is grown up, you will bitterly repent having brought into the world a child who can call no man father.

JANET [*passionately*]. Never! Never! That I'm sure of. Whatever happens, even if Johnny should come to hate me for what I did, I shall always be glad to have been his mother. At least I shall have lived. These poor women who go through life listless and dull, who have never felt the joys and the pains a mother feels, how they would envy me if they knew! If they knew! To know that a child is your very own, is a part of you. That you have faced sickness and pain and death itself for it. That it is yours and nothing can take it from you because no one can understand its wants as you do. To feel its soft breath on your cheek, to soothe it when it is fretful and still it when it cries, that is motherhood and that is glorious!

[JOHNNY *runs in by the door on the left. He is obviously in the highest spirits at the thought of going home.*]

JOHNNY. The trap is round, Mummie, and the luggage is in.

JANET. That's right. Good-bye, father. [*He does not move.*] Say good-bye to your grandfather, Johnny. You won't see him again.

[DE MULLIN *kisses* JOHNNY.]

MRS. DE MULLIN. Janet!

JANET. No, mother. It's best not. [*Kisses her.*] It would only be painful for father. Good-bye, Aunt Harriet. Good-bye, Hester.

[*Looks at* HESTER *doubtfully.* HESTER *rises, goes to her slowly and kisses her.*]

HESTER. Good-bye.

[*Exeunt* JOHNNY *and* JANET *by the door on the right.*]

DE MULLIN [*his grey head bowed on his chest as* MRS. DE MULLIN *timidly lays her hand on his shoulder*]. The last of the De Mullins! The last of the De Mullins!

[*The Curtain falls.*]

THE BURGLAR WHO FAILED

(1908)

CHARACTERS

Mrs. Maxwell.
Dolly, *her daughter.*
Bill Bludgeon.

Scene : Dolly's bedroom in the Maxwells' house at Wimbledon.

THE BURGLAR WHO FAILED

SCENE.—DOLLY'S *bedroom in the* MAXWELLS' *house at Wimbledon. The prevailing note of the room is white. Mantelpiece, woodwork and the furniture are all painted white. The wall-paper and carpet are of a quiet, restful green, and the only colour is in the bright chintz of the window curtains, the chair cushions and the valance of the bed. There is no suggestion of "High Art" about the decoration of the room, nor yet of luxury, only of cleanness and daintiness and fresh air. It is not aggressively tidy, for* DOLLY *has just taken off her things and is not very careful about where she throws them down. An old tennis racquet leans against the washing-stand near the door. A cricket bat and a hockey stick are leaning against a chair near the window. On the mantelpiece, a framed photograph or two of* DOLLY'S *school friends, and an alarm clock. The room is lighted by electric lights controlled by a switch in the wall within easy reach both of anyone lying in bed and also of anyone entering by the door. When the curtain rises* MRS. MAXWELL, *in evening dress, is sitting in a wicker chair.* DOLLY, *in her night-gown with red slippers on her feet, is standing by the bed. She has her hair down. She picks up evening skirt from the bed and throws it on to the chair by the bedside, on which a white evening blouse already lies. Then she turns to the dressing-table.*

MRS. MAXWELL [*remonstrating*]. Dolly !

DOLLY. What is it, mother ?

MRS. MAXWELL. You're not going to leave that skirt there, are you ?

DOLLY. Why not, mother?

[*Beginning to brush hair with great vigour.*

MRS. MAXWELL. Because it ought to be hung up, of course. What do I give you a wardrobe for if not to hang your things in?

DOLLY [*still brushing*]. All right, mother. I will in a minute.

MRS. MAXWELL [*complainingly*]. How can you expect your dresses to look tidy if you fling them about like that? I'm sure if I've told you about hanging things up once I've told you a hundred times.

DOLLY [*laughing*]. You have, mother dear. You have. I'm an undutiful daughter and that's all about it. [*Goes and hangs up skirt in wardrobe.*] There! Is that all right?

MRS. MAXWELL. Now, there's the blouse!

[*The removal of the skirt has revealed the blouse.*

DOLLY [*laughing again*]. I forgot the blouse. [*Folds it rapidly on bed.*] I do hate folding things up. I always crumple them. [*Puts it away in drawer of wardrobe.*] There! That's done! Say I'm a good girl, mother.

[*Lays a hand on her shoulder.* MRS. MAXWELL *pats it. Then* DOLLY *returns to the dressing-table and brushes hair more vigorously than ever.*]

MRS. MAXWELL [*half horrified, half amused*]. My dear! Do be careful with your hair. How can you be so rough with it!

DOLLY. It doesn't mind, bless you.

MRS. MAXWELL. You'll tear it out by the roots if you brush it like that. Brush it gently.

DOLLY. Then it takes so long. However, it's done now. [*Begins to plait it rapidly for the night.*

MRS. MAXWELL. I'm sure my hair would never stand such treatment!

DOLLY [*laughing*]. I expect you've pampered it, mother.

[*Lays a hand on her shoulder again, caressingly.*

MRS. MAXWELL. Silly child! And now get into bed and go to sleep. It's getting late.

DOLLY. In a minute. I must look at my bat first. I oiled it this afternoon. I want to see how it's getting on.

[*Takes the cricket-bat from its place by the window, and examines it critically.*]

MRS. MAXWELL. Can't you do that to-morrow?

DOLLY. I might, of course. But I don't think I will. I'm afraid I shall want a new bat soon, mother. This one's getting awfully old, though it is a dear.

MRS. MAXWELL [*sighs*]. The number of things girls want nowadays is simply dreadful. I can't think why you want to play cricket at all. You were playing hockey only the other day.

DOLLY. Yes. But the hockey season's over now. You can't play hockey in summer, can you?

MRS. MAXWELL. I don't know.

DOLLY. Of course you can't. It's too hot. One must play cricket in summer. [*Puts back the bat in its place and takes up the hockey stick, which she brandishes for a moment.*] No more hockey now till the autumn.

MRS. MAXWELL. Do be careful, dear. You'll break something.

DOLLY. It's all right, mother.

[*Brandishing stick, but more gently.*

MRS. MAXWELL. I never understand why girls play hockey at all. Or cricket either. They seem to me horrid games. And I'm sure they're dangerous. Why can't you be contented to play lawn tennis? Or croquet, as I used to do?

DOLLY. I can't bear croquet, mother. I call it a rotten game.

MRS. MAXWELL. Dolly!

DOLLY [*putting back hockey stick*]. What? Oh, I forgot. I mustn't say "rotten," must I? But it is rather

a rotten game, isn't it? And tennis isn't up to much either compared to cricket. Besides, I can't play tennis till I have a new racquet. [MRS. MAXWELL *groans.*] Mine's sprung. [*Takes it up and sounds it critically on the floor.*] I can hear it.

MRS. MAXWELL [*comic exasperation*]. Dolly, go to bed.

DOLLY. All right, mother. [*Puts back the racquet.*] As soon as I've opened the window. [*She pulls back the curtains*]. Oh, it is open. That's all right. [*Leans out.*] I say, what a lovely moon! It's as bright as day.

MRS. MAXWELL. Do you mean to say it's been open all the evening?

DOLLY [*carelessly*]. What? The window? I dare say.

MRS. MAXWELL. Oh, Dolly! When you know Mrs. Summerville had her watch stolen from her dressing-table less than a month ago just through that. The man got in while they were at dinner. Mrs. Summerville was so vexed. She valued that watch.

DOLLY. It's all right, mother. No one would get in up here. It's too high.

MRS. MAXWELL. One never knows. They might climb up by the creeper. Or a pipe, or something. And there have been such a number of burglaries in Wimbledon lately. The Mallabys' dog was shot by one only last week.

DOLLY. Yes. Poor Binky!

MRS. MAXWELL. And one broke into the McAndrews' the week before. Major McAndrew actually saw him. A dreadful-looking man with a huge nose and the most ruffianly expression. A perfect savage, the Major said. It's a wonder the Major wasn't killed. No, Dolly, I can't have the windows left open at night while we're downstairs. With your father in India and Gerald at Oxford it's not safe.

DOLLY. All right, mother dear, I'll remember. [*Turning to the bed.*] And now I really think I'm ready.

MRS. MAXWELL. At last! [*Rises.*] Aren't you going

to draw your curtains? You'll never be able to sleep with all that moonlight.

DOLLY. Oh yes, I shall. I like the moon. It looks so pretty. And if the curtains are drawn it keeps out all the air. [*Puts off slippers and jumps into bed.*

MRS. MAXWELL [*shivering*]. Well, if you catch your death of cold don't blame me.

DOLLY. I never catch cold, mother. Good-night.

MRS. MAXWELL [*at bedside*]. Good-night. [*Kisses her, goes to the door and opens it.*] Sleep well.

DOLLY. Yes, mother. Good-night.

[*Exit* MRS. MAXWELL. DOLLY *snuggles herself down in bed and turns off the light. The room is left in darkness save for a broad band of moonlight which streams in from the window diagonally across the floor, reaching as far as the foot of the bed. For a moment or two there is silence, broken only by* DOLLY'S *regular breathing. Then the chair at foot of bed is pushed cautiously away and the head of* BILL BLUDGEON *is thrust out from under the bed into the moonlight. It is a villainous-looking head with tousled red hair, ragged beard and a hooked nose of huge proportions. He looks round to see if the coast is clear, blinks at the moonlight and rubs his eyes irritably. He is just about to crawl out of his hiding-place when* DOLLY *turns over in her bed. Head bobs swiftly under bed again. Another pause. Then head once more slowly thrust out.* BLUDGEON *is just about to crawl out when a sharp knock is heard as of something being dropped.* DOLLY *starts up. Head withdrawn again.*]

DOLLY [*startled but not alarmed at all*]. What was that? [*Turns on light.*] Come in. [*Silence.*] Is that you, mother? [*Silence. To herself.*] I thought I heard a knock. [*Gets up.*] Is anyone there? [*To herself.*] I'm sure I heard something. [*Puts on slippers, gets dressing-gown from wardrobe, then goes to door, opens it and looks out.*] No one. The lights are all out. I must have dreamt it.

[*Shuts door and turns away. As she does so a resounding sneeze comes from under the bed. Then another and another. She seizes hockey stick from the corner by window and goes to foot of bed.*] Who's that? Who is it? [*Head thrust out.*] Oh! It's a burglar!

BLUDGEON [*in ferocious undertone*]. Yes, it's me, missie. And if you scream or raise your voice it'll be the worse for you! [*Begins to crawl out on hands and knees.*

DOLLY. Go back! Go back at once or I'll hit you! [*Raises stick menacingly.*

BLUDGEON. Now then, young woman, none o' that! You can't hurt me, you know.

DOLLY. Can't I?

[*Hits him sharply over the fingers.*

BLUDGEON. Ow! [*Cry of pain.*

DOLLY. Go back when I tell you! If you don't I'll hit you again. [*Hits other hand smartly.*

BLUDGEON. Ow!

DOLLY. I told you I would. Go back. [*Hits ground in front of his fingers.* BLUDGEON *backs hurriedly under bed again.*] What do you mean by being in my room like this? What do you mean? . . . Ah, would you?

[*This as head emerges from under side of bed facing audience. She brings down stick within an inch of it.* BLUDGEON *draws it back sharply, thereby hitting it hard against the bed.*]

BLUDGEON. Ow!

DOLLY. There! Now you've hurt yourself! [BLUDGEON *makes another attempt to emerge by the front of the bed. He is again driven back by stick.*] But it's no more than you deserve for coming here at all!

[*For a moment nothing is heard save* DOLLY'S *excited breathing. Then the valance is cautiously raised and his head is seen. It does not, however, venture to protrude as the stick is raised menacingly.*]

BLUDGEON. Look here, missie, this won't do, you know.

DOLLY. Won't it?

BLUDGEON. No, it won't. You can't keep me under this bed all night, can you? 'Tain't likely. Now I don't want to have to hurt you——

DOLLY. Hurt me! [*Scornfully.*

BLUDGEON. But I'm an ugly customer to tackle. I'm Bill Bludgeon, I am, and if that name doesn't tell you the sort of man you've got to deal with, why it ought to. Now it's no use your shouting out or calling for help, because there ain't no men in the house, as I know very well, and there ain't no police within a mile, neither. So just you put down that stick and behave yourself or I'll have to make you!

DOLLY [*scornfully*]. How will you make me?

BLUDGEON. With this.

[*Suddenly produces revolver and levels it at her. She starts back.*]

DOLLY [*indignant*]. Oh!

BLUDGEON [*sneer*]. Ah, I thought I should scare you! Now p'r'aps you'll let me come out. [*Starts to do so.*

DOLLY. You wicked ruffian! [*Hits his hand sharply with stick. He drops revolver. With dexterous sweep of hockey stick she sweeps it over to herself, picks it up, cocks it and levels it at his head.*] If you move another inch I'll fire.

BLUDGEON [*in terror, entire change of tone. Gruff menace turned to shrill note of alarm.*] Look out! You've cocked it! It'll go off if you're not careful. It's loaded.

[*Backing ignominiously.*

DOLLY [*scornfully*]. Of course it's loaded. What's the good of carrying a revolver if it isn't loaded?

BLUDGEON [*almost whispering with terror*]. Put it down, miss, for Heaven's sake! It's not safe, I tell you.

DOLLY. You coward! I believe you're afraid!

BLUDGEON. I should think I was afraid. Trust a woman with loaded firearms? Not me! [*Entreating.*] Put it down, there's a good girl. You'll kill me, I know you will. *Do put it DOWN!*

DOLLY. Sh! If I put it down, how am I to know you won't get violent again?

BLUDGEON. Violent! Me violent now? Why, I couldn't if I tried, miss. My nerve's gone. I'm all of a tremble. I couldn't hurt a fly now, not if it was to save my life. Do put it down and let me get out of this.

DOLLY. If I do, will you promise to behave yourself?

BLUDGEON [*eagerly*]. Yes, yes, miss. I'll promise. I'll promise anything.

DOLLY. But you must be serious about it. You're not serious.

BLUDGEON [*his voice rising to almost a scream of mingled nervousness and terror*]. Not serious! With you flourishing a loaded revolver within an inch of my nose! Not serious?

DOLLY. Hush! You'll wake some one.

BLUDGEON [*half whimper, half whisper*]. Not serious? Oh, Lord!

DOLLY. Very well. I'll let you get up if you'll promise to go away quietly and never come here again.

BLUDGEON [*eagerly*]. I promise, miss. I promise faithfully.

DOLLY. And you'll keep your promise?

BLUDGEON. That I will, miss. [*Burst of candour.*] You don't suppose I want to face a little wild-cat like you again, do you? Not likely!

DOLLY. Then you may come out. Quietly now.

[*She backs a little and stands by the wicker chair, pointing revolver at him as he slowly emerges.*]

BLUDGEON [*meekly*]. Would you mind not pointing

it at me while I come out, miss? It makes me nervous. You don't know how easily them things go off.

DOLLY. I'll be careful.

BLUDGEON [*entreating*]. To oblige me, miss.

DOLLY. Very well. [*Lowers muzzle.*

BLUDGEON [*gratefully*]. There's a good young lady. [*Crawls slowly from his hiding-place and sinks on to chair by bedside with a sigh of relief.*] Oof!

[*Mops his brow with red handkerchief.*

DOLLY [*after a pause during which she surveys him critically*]. And now you'd better go.

BLUDGEON [*submissively*]. In a minute, miss. May I rest a little before I start? I'm trembling all over still.

DOLLY. Just for a minute, then. But you mustn't stay long.

BLUDGEON. No, miss.

[*Removes great shock of red wig and wipes perspiration from his head, which is small and sparsely furnished with thin black hair.*]

DOLLY. Why, you're wearing a wig! Is your beard false, too?

BLUDGEON. Yes, miss.

DOLLY. What fun! Do take it off.

[*He takes it off.*

[*She bursts into a merry laugh.*] How queer you look like that, with your great big nose and your little, little head!

BLUDGEON [*hurt*]. It's not my nose, miss.

[*Takes it off and sits revealed as a seedy, pallid little pug-nosed person of the meekest type.*]

DOLLY [*laughing more*]. Oh, you are funny!

BLUDGEON [*alarmed*]. Sh! Sh! Some one will hear.

DOLLY [*subduing her laughter*]. But why do you dress up like that? Is it to disguise yourself?

BLUDGEON. Well, if you are to be a burglar, miss,

you must look like a burglar, mustn't you? And I'm unfortunate in that respect. I haven't the appearance for it and that's a fact. No one would believe in me if I didn't wear these. [*Points to wig and beard, then stuffs them into pocket. Complainingly.*] It's a great handicap for a man in my profession. That's why I call myself Bill Bludgeon, miss. It frightens people. And that's what a burglar wants.

DOLLY. Isn't Bill Bludgeon your real name?

BLUDGEON. No, miss. My real name is William Simpkins.

DOLLY. I see. [*Pause.*] How long have you been a burglar?

BLUDGEON. Not long, miss. [*Sneezes dolefully.*] Only six weeks. Excuse me, miss.

DOLLY [*concerned*]. I'm afraid you've got a dreadful cold.

BLUDGEON. So would you, miss, if you'd been lying under that bed for the best part of an hour. [*Shivers.*] Could we have that window shut, miss? [*Very sorry for himself.*] My chest's not strong.

DOLLY. Of course, if you like. [*Shuts it.*] Did you get in by the window?

BLUDGEON. I did, miss. Climbed up by the pipe. I meant to have got here earlier, but my watch was wrong. [*Looks at it disparagingly.*

DOLLY [*looking at it as he takes it out*]. Oh! That's Mrs. Summerville's watch! You stole it from her dressing-table!

BLUDGEON [*hurriedly putting it back in his pocket*]. Yes, miss. And a wretched watch it is too. If it hadn't been for that watch I shouldn't be here now.

DOLLY. Wouldn't you?

BLUDGEON. No, miss. I should have been in this room by nine sharp, took all I wanted and been clear away before you'd left the drawing-room. That's what I meant to

do. As it was I didn't get here till close on ten. And then you and your ma come up, and if I hadn't switched off the light and been under that bed before you could say knife you'd have nabbed me. I'd only just time. And I've been lying under that bed in that draught ever since, hardly daring to breathe. Lucky for me I didn't sneeze before, miss [*cunningly*], wasn't it?

DOLLY. Why?

BLUDGEON [*cunningly*]. 'Cos then you'd have been two to one, miss. Is your ma as nippy with a hockey stick as you are?

DOLLY [*laughing*]. I don't think so.

BLUDGEON. Ah, I wouldn't trust her! Women aren't what they used to be.

DOLLY. That's just what mother says.

BLUDGEON. Does she, miss? [*Sneezes again.*] I shall die of this cold. I know I shall.

DOLLY. How did you catch it?

[*Leans against wicker chair, prepared to listen to his story.*]

BLUDGEON. Up at Major McAndrew's, miss. That's a cruel draughty house, that is!

DOLLY. Was it you who broke into Major McAndrew's, too?

BLUDGEON. It was, miss. And precious glad I was to break out again, I can tell you. What a man! Perfect savage, I call him! As soon as he saw me he snatched up a great stick and ran at me like a mad bull. It's a wonder I wasn't killed! I'd nothing in my hand but a jemmy. And what's a jemmy against a stick? Simply useless. One gets flurried and then one drops it. As I did just now, miss, when I was under that bed.

DOLLY. Was that the noise I heard? [BLUDGEON *nods.*] You butter-fingers!

BLUDGEON. Since then I've carried a revolver, just in self-defence. I needed it, too, a week later.

DOLLY [*horrified*]. Did you kill somebody with it?

BLUDGEON. Not a man, miss. Only a dog.

DOLLY [*sternly*]. So you shot Binky!

BLUDGEON. Was that his name, miss? A great bull-dog up at Miss Mallaby's.

DOLLY [*indignantly*]. I think it was horrid of you to shoot Binky. It was cowardly.

BLUDGEON. Cowardly! Bravest deed I ever done, miss, by a long chalk. It takes nerve to shoot a bull-dog, I can tell you, when he's got his teeth in your leg. You'll very likely shoot your own leg if you're not careful.

DOLLY. Had he his teeth in your leg? I remember they said his mouth was full of blood when they found him.

BLUDGEON. It was. My blood!

DOLLY. Still I don't think you ought to have shot him. He was such a friendly doggie with people he knew.

BLUDGEON. Then he evidently didn't know me, miss. I tried to make friends with him. I said "Good dog" and "Down, sir," and all the things one does say to a dog one wants to be friendly with, but he wouldn't pay any attention. He just growled and came at me. I simply had to shoot. And, of course, that spoilt my game at the Mallabys', for the noise woke everybody. Old Miss Mallaby threw up her window and screamed fit to wake the dead, and I had to run for it.

DOLLY. Poor Miss Mallaby! You almost frightened her into a fit.

BLUDGEON. She almost frightened me into a fit, rousing the whole neighbourhood like that. Sh! What was that? [*Listens with strained attention.*] Nothing.

[*Sigh of relief.*

DOLLY. Well, I think it's very wrong breaking into people's houses at night and making every one uncomfortable.

BLUDGEON [*hurt*]. Do you suppose it's very comfortable for me, miss? Do I like going about at night with my cold on me, hiding under beds in a thorough draught

and being set upon by fierce dogs and savage majors? You don't seem to think of me. But nobody ever does think about burglars, not with sympathy. That old Major McAndrew with his stick; he'd have killed me as soon as look at me. So would you, miss, with that revolver. Potted me like a rabbit, you would. Oh, you don't know what a life it is, miss! The waiting about in gardens under bushes with the rain getting down your neck, and feeling your way in dark rooms when you daren't strike a match, and keep hitting yourself against the furniture. And then the strain on the nerves, miss, listening for a footstep and always imagining you hear one.—I thought I heard one then. No. Nothing.—Yes, it's a nerve-shattering business, miss, burglary is. I've not been the same man since I took to it. And the profits! Simply miserable. This is the sixth house I've broke into since I began and not a single thing have I got out of them except Mrs. Summerville's watch. And it loses! If I do strike a good crib there's a dog or some man hears me and I can't stop. And if there isn't a dog or a man, ten to one there's nothing worth taking and the plate's electro. Oh, it's a beastly profession!

DOLLY. But why did you become a burglar at all if you don't like it?

BLUDGEON. Well, I was out of a place, miss. And a man must do something for a living, mustn't he? So I became a burglar. But it was a mistake, miss. I see that now. I'm not cut out for a burglar and that's the fact. I haven't the nerve and I haven't the constitution. [*Despondently.*] I'm a failure at it, that's what I am, an utter failure. [*Mops eyes with dirty red handkerchief.*

DOLLY. I believe you're crying! You mustn't do that. Burglars don't cry, you know.

BLUDGEON. Not if they're successful, miss. But when you're a failure as I am it's different. I shall never succeed as a burglar. I've thought so for some time and now

I'm sure of it. [*Dismally.*] I shall have to give it up.

DOLLY. Give it up?

BLUDGEON. Yes, miss. [*Mopping eyes.*

DOLLY. I'm so glad! And I think you're quite right. Nobody ought to be in any profession they don't like, ought they? And nobody ought to be a burglar at all. It's not a very nice profession, is it? And you mustn't be despondent because you've failed. Every one fails sometimes, you know. Mother had a cousin who was a company promoter and he failed. But father found him something else to do and he's all right now. Father said company promoting wasn't a very nice profession either.

BLUDGEON [*meekly*]. Did he, miss?

DOLLY. Yes. And we must find you something else to do. I wonder what it had better be? [*Pause for thought.*] Let me see. Do you know anything about gardening? Mother wants a new gardener, I know.

BLUDGEON. I'm afraid I don't, miss.

DOLLY. That's a pity. [*She ponders for a minute or two, puckering her brows. Then is struck by a brilliant inspiration.*] Why shouldn't you enlist?

BLUDGEON [*horrified disgust*]. Enlist!

DOLLY. Yes. Go into the army and be a soldier.

BLUDGEON. I don't think I'm quite cut out for a soldier, miss. It's hardly the profession for a man who is nervous with firearms. I think I'd rather be a gardener.

DOLLY. But I'm afraid you can't do that if you don't know anything about gardens. You might learn, of course. But mother wants some one at once.

BLUDGEON [*depressed*]. I see, miss.

DOLLY. What were you before you became a burglar?

BLUDGEON. I was a footman, miss.

DOLLY. A footman?

BLUDGEON. Yes, miss. At General Atkinson's up in Kensington.

DOLLY. How very odd! I knew footmen stole

sometimes, but I'd no idea they ever became burglars.

BLUDGEON. They don't often, miss.

DOLLY. Why did you give up being a footman?

BLUDGEON. I lost my place, miss.

DOLLY [*gravely*]. Do you mean you were sent away?

BLUDGEON. Yes, miss.

DOLLY. I hope you didn't steal, Simpkins?

BLUDGEON. No, miss. Not then.

DOLLY. Then why were you sent away?

BLUDGEON. It was the drink, miss.

DOLLY [*shocked*]. Simpkins!

BLUDGEON. It was my evening out, miss, and I'd had a drop too much, and when I got back I was rather noisy. The General heard me as I was going upstairs and I was discharged.

DOLLY [*gravely*]. I hope you don't drink now, Simpkins? Because I couldn't recommend you for a new situation if you weren't sober.

BLUDGEON. Oh no, miss. I'm perfectly sober now. A burglar daren't drink, miss. It's too risky. All burglars who are out of prison are total abstainers. I took the pledge myself as soon as I took to the profession. I believe that's how I got this cold. A drop of spirits might have kept it off.

DOLLY. You must try putting your feet into hot water instead.

BLUDGEON. Very well, miss.

DOLLY. And when your cold's well we must get you a place as footman again. The Smith-Hardings are wanting a new footman just now. Mrs. Smith-Harding told mother so the other day when she called. I'm sure that would suit you. The Smith-Hardings are *quite* nice people. You'll like the place, I know.

BLUDGEON. I don't see how I'm to get the place without a character, miss. And I don't think General Atkinson would recommend me.

DOLLY. Never mind. I'll recommend you. And mother shall give you a character. I'll speak to her about it to-morrow.

BLUDGEON. Thank you, miss. Sh ! What was that ? [*Listens with strained attention.*] Wasn't that a door opening ?

DOLLY. I didn't hear anything.

BLUDGEON [*listening*]. Now it's closing again. Sh ! Who sleeps at the end of the passage ?

[*Standing up, straining his ears.*

DOLLY. Mother.

BLUDGEON [*loud whisper*]. I can hear her footsteps. She's coming here. [*Terrified.*] What am I to do ?

DOLLY. Quick ! The window. [*Runs and opens it.*] You must go.

BLUDGEON. I can't. It takes time to get out of a window.

DOLLY. You must.

[*Seizes him by arm and drags him forward.*

BLUDGEON [*hanging back*]. I can't. It takes time, I tell you. If I did it in a hurry I should break my neck.

DOLLY. Hide then ! Quick !

BLUDGEON. Where ?

DOLLY. Here !

[*Opens wardrobe cupboard. He bolts into it and closes door.* DOLLY *crosses room swiftly, kicks off slippers, throws dressing-gown on chair, jumps into bed and turns off light. The dressing-gown slips in a heap on to the ground.*]

MRS. MAXWELL [*bursting in nervously, in frightened tone*]. Dolly. [*No answer from* DOLLY.] Dolly ! Are you awake, dear ?

Enter MRS. MAXWELL. *She has not undressed but is in a peignoir or loose tea-gown of some kind, as if she had been reading a novel in her bedroom in an arm-chair. She turns up light.*

DOLLY [*feigning great sleepiness*]. Yes, mother. Is that you? Do you want anything?

MRS. MAXWELL [*turning up lights*]. I thought I heard voices.

DOLLY [*sleepily*]. Did you, mother?

MRS. MAXWELL. Yes. They seemed to come from here. Have you been asleep?

DOLLY. Not yet, mother. [*Innocently.*] And anyhow I don't talk in my sleep, do I?

MRS. MAXWELL [*anxiously*]. You haven't heard anything?

DOLLY. Heard what, mother dear?

MRS. MAXWELL. People talking. One of them sounded like a man, I thought. Do you think anyone can have got into the house? That window——

[*Turning nervously towards it.*

DOLLY. Mother, don't be fanciful. You've been sitting up thinking about burglars instead of taking off your things and going to bed till you've made yourself quite nervous.

MRS. MAXWELL. Yes, I am nervous to-night somehow. It's foolish, I suppose. But with your father away . . . Do you mind if I sit with you for a little, dear? I'd rather not go back to my room just yet.

DOLLY [*yawning elaborately*]. All right, mother, if you don't stay too long. I'm dreadfully sleepy.

MRS. MAXWELL. Thank you, dear. [*Sitting on bed. Sees dressing-gown on floor; remonstrating.*] Dolly!

DOLLY [*startled*]. What is it, mother?

MRS. MAXWELL. Your dressing-gown. It's lying on the floor all in a heap.

DOLLY [*relieved*]. Is that all? [*Closing eyes.*] Just throw it on the bed, there's a good mother.

MRS. MAXWELL [*rising*]. Throw it on the bed! Certainly not! [*Picks it up and comes forward.*

DOLLY. What are you going to do with it?

MRS. MAXWELL. Hang it up in the wardrobe, of course.

DOLLY [*leaping from her bed, all pretence of sleepiness banished*]. I'll do it, mother. [*Takes it from her.*

MRS. MAXWELL. My dear, I can manage.

DOLLY. No, mother, I'd rather. You go and sit down there like a good mother.

[*Puts her into chair by bedside. Then hangs up dressing-gown in wardrobe. There is a momentary glimpse of* BLUDGEON *as the door opens and shuts.*]

MRS. MAXWELL. Silly child, I never meant you to get up specially. I could have done it quite well.

DOLLY [*laughing*]. Not so well as I did, mother. [*Getting back into bed.*] By the way, mother dear, didn't Mrs. Smith-Harding tell you she was wanting a new footman the other day?

MRS. MAXWELL. I think she did say something about it.

DOLLY. Well, I've found her one.

MRS. MAXWELL. Have you, dear? Where?

[*Looking vaguely about as if* DOLLY *might have left one about the room.*]

DOLLY. Here, in Wimbledon. I met him to-day quite by chance. Wasn't it lucky? We got into conversation and he said he was out of a place and wanted another, so I said I thought I knew of one and I would recommend him.

MRS. MAXWELL. But, my dear child, you know nothing about him.

DOLLY. Oh yes, I do, mother. I know a great deal about him. He was in service for a time and then he took to—other work. But he doesn't like his present employment. It's not regular enough. So he wants to go back

to service again. So I said he was to come up to the house to-morrow morning and you'd give him a character.

MRS. MAXWELL. My dear, how can I possibly give a man a character whom I've never even seen?

DOLLY. But you will have seen him to-morrow. That's why I told him to come. I know you'll like him when you do see him. He has such a funny little face. And he's a total abstainer, and you know you like total abstainers. Come, mother, don't make difficulties but say you'll do what I ask.

MRS. MAXWELL [*evasively*]. Well, I'll see what can be done.

DOLLY. That's not enough. You must promise to recommend him to Mrs. Smith-Harding. Mrs. Smith-Harding is sure to take anyone you recommend. She thinks no end of you, mother. Promise!

MRS. MAXWELL. Very well. I promise.

DOLLY. That's right. [*Kisses her mother.*] And now you must go back to your room and go to bed. [*Feigning a yawn.*] It's time to go to sleep.

MRS. MAXWELL [*rising*]. Perhaps I'd better.

DOLLY. And you won't be afraid of burglars any more, will you? It's simply absurd to be afraid of burglars. They're much more afraid of you really.

MRS. MAXWELL. Silly child! [*Kisses her.*] What do you know about burglars?

DOLLY. More than you think, mother dear. Good-night.

MRS. MAXWELL. Good-night. [*Kisses her.*

DOLLY. Good-night. [*More sleepily.*]

[DOLLY *puts out light. Exit* MRS. MAXWELL. *The room is now lit by the moonlight only. A pause. Then* DOLLY *sits up cautiously and listens. Gets out of bed, goes to door, listens again, opens the door and looks out, closes it, switches on electric light, crosses swiftly and quietly to wardrobe. Opens door. She speaks in a loud whisper.*]

DOLLY. You can come out. It's safe now.

BLUDGEON. Are you sure? [*Looks cautiously out of wardrobe. Is about to emerge.*] No, here's some one coming. [*Tries to get back.* DOLLY *drags him out.*]

DOLLY. Nonsense! Come along. Don't make a noise. [BLUDGEON *emerges from cupboard wiping his brow.*] You must go. [*Goes to window.*] There's no one in sight.

BLUDGEON. Very well, miss.

[BLUDGEON *goes to window, gets on to sill, and cautiously feels with his foot for pipe outside.*]

DOLLY. Be careful where you put your foot. Quietly. Have you found the pipe?

BLUDGEON [*who is now on window-sill, reaching out with foot*]. Not yet, miss.

DOLLY. Try again.

BLUDGEON. I think I've got it now, miss.

DOLLY. That's right. And you heard what mother said?

BLUDGEON. About the place? Yes, miss.

DOLLY. Very well. Come up to-morrow morning about ten and she'll see you and give you a character. Good-night.

BLUDGEON. Good-night, miss, and thank you ever so much.

[*She nods and smiles. He disappears through window. Pause.*]

DOLLY. Good-night. [*Pause. She leans out looking after him. Speaking off in cautious undertone.*] Are you down?

BLUDGEON [*off. Loud whisper*]. Yes, miss.

DOLLY. That's right. [*Loud whisper.*] And take care of your cold.

BLUDGEON [*outside*]. Good-night.

DOLLY. Good-night. [*She turns with a sigh of content, and suddenly sees revolver lying half concealed by the cushion of wicker chair. Picks it up.*] Careless man, he's forgotten his revolver !

[*Puts it away in a drawer as curtain falls.*

CURTAIN.

THE CONSTANT LOVER

A COMEDY OF YOUTH IN ONE ACT

(1908)

"As of old when the world's heart was lighter"

CHARACTERS

Evelyn Rivers (18 or 20).
Cecil Harburton (25).

THE CONSTANT LOVER

Before the curtain rises the orchestra will play the Woodland Music (cuckoo) from Hansel and Gretel, and possibly some of the Greig Pastoral Music from "Peer Gynt," or some Gabriel Fauré.

SCENE.—*A glade in a wood, with a great beech-tree, the branches of which overhang the stage, the brilliant sunlight filtering through them. The sky where it can be seen through the branches is a cloudless blue.*

[*When the curtain rises* CECIL HARBURTON *is discovered sitting on the ground under the tree, leaning his back against its trunk and reading a book. He wears a straw hat and the lightest of grey flannel suits. The chattering of innumerable small birds is heard while the curtain is still down, and this grows louder as it rises, and we find ourselves in the wood. Presently a wood pigeon cooes in the distance. Then a thrush begins to sing in the tree above* CECIL'S *head and is answered by another. After a moment* CECIL *looks up.*]

CECIL. By Jove, that's jolly! [*Listens for a moment, then returns to his book. Suddenly a cuckoo begins to call insistently. After a moment or two he looks up again.*] Cuckoo too! Bravo! [*Again he returns to his book.*]

[*A moment later* EVELYN RIVERS *enters. She also wears the lightest of summer dresses, as it is a cloudless day in May. On her head is a shady straw hat. As she approaches the tree a twig snaps under her foot and* CECIL *looks up. He jumps to his feet, closing book, and*

advances to her eagerly, holding out his right hand, keeping the book in his left.]

CECIL [*reproachfully*]. Here you are at last!

EVELYN. At last!

CECIL. Yes. You're awfully late. [*Looks at watch.*

EVELYN. Am I?

CECIL. You know you are. I expected you at three.

EVELYN. Why? I never said I'd come at three. Indeed, I never *said* I'd come at all.

CECIL. No. But it's always been three.

EVELYN. Has it?

CECIL. And now it's half-past. I consider I've been cheated out of a whole half-hour.

EVELYN. I couldn't help it. Mother kept me. She wanted the roses done in the drawing-room.

CECIL. How stupid of Mrs. Rivers!

EVELYN. Mr. Harburton!

CECIL. What's the matter?

EVELYN. I don't think you *ought* to call my mother stupid.

CECIL. Why not—if she is stupid? Most parents are stupid, by the way. I've noticed it before. Mrs. Rivers ought to have thought of the roses earlier. The morning is the proper time to gather roses. Didn't you tell her that?

EVELYN. I'm afraid I couldn't very well. You see it was really I who ought to have thought of the roses! I always do them. But this morning I forgot.

CECIL. I see. [*Turning towards the tree.*] Well, sit down now you are here. Isn't it a glorious day?

EVELYN [*hesitating*]. I don't believe I *ought* to sit down.

CECIL [*turns to her*]. Why not? There's no particular virtue about standing, is there? I hate standing. So let's sit down and be comfortable.

[*She sits, so does he. She sits on the bank under the tree to the left of it. He sits below the bank to the right of it.*]

EVELYN. But *ought* I to be sitting here with you? That's what I mean. It's—not as if I really *knew* you, is it?

CECIL. Not *know* me?

[*The chatter of birds dies away.*

EVELYN. Not properly—we've never even been introduced. We just met quite by chance here in the wood.

CECIL. Yes. [*Ecstatically.*] What a glorious chance!

EVELYN. Still, I'm sure mother wouldn't approve.

CECIL. And *you* say Mrs. Rivers isn't stupid!

EVELYN [*laughing*]. I expect most people would agree with her. Most people would say you oughtn't to have spoken to a girl you didn't know like that.

CECIL. Oh, come, I only asked my way back to the inn.

EVELYN. There was no harm in asking your way, of course. But then we began talking of other things. And then we sat down under this tree. And we've sat talking under this tree every afternoon since. And that was a week ago.

CECIL. Well, it's such an awfully jolly tree.

EVELYN. I don't know *what* mother would say if she heard of it.

CECIL. Would it be something unpleasant?

EVELYN [*ruefully*]. I'm afraid it would.

CECIL. How fortunate you don't know it then.

EVELYN [*pondering*[. Still, if I really *oughtn't* to be here. . . . Do *you* think I oughtn't to be here?

CECIL. I don't think I should go into that if I were you. Sensible people think of what they want to do, not of what they *ought* to do, otherwise they get confused. And then of course they do the wrong thing.

EVELYN. But if I do what I oughtn't, I generally find I'm sorry for it afterwards.

CECIL. Not half so sorry as you would have been if you hadn't done it. In this world the things one regrets

are the things one hasn't done. For instance, if I hadn't spoken to you a week ago here in the wood, I should have regretted it all my life.

EVELYN. Would you ? [*He nods.*] Really and truly ?

CECIL [*nods*]. Really and truly.

[*He lays his hand on her's for a moment, she lets it rest there. Cuckoo calls loudly once or twice—she draws her hand away.*]

EVELYN. There's the cuckoo.

[CECIL *rises and sits on the bank by her side, leaning against tree.*]

CECIL. Yes. Isn't he jolly ? Don't you love cuckoos ?

EVELYN. They *are* rather nice.

CECIL. Aren't they ! And such clever beggars. Most birds are fools—like most people. As soon as they're grown up they go and get married, and then the rest of their lives are spent in bringing up herds of children and wondering how on earth to pay their school-bills. Your cuckoo sees the folly of all that. No school-bills for *her !* No nursing the baby ! She just flits from hedgerow to hedgerow flirting with other cuckoos. And when she lays an egg she lays it in some one else's nest, which saves all the trouble of housekeeping. Oh, a wise bird !

EVELYN [*pouting, looking away from him*]. I don't know that I *do* like cuckoos so much after all. They sound to me rather selfish.

CECIL. Yes. But so sensible ! The duck's a wise bird too in her way. [*She turns to him.*] But *her* way's different from the cuckoo's. [*Matter-of-fact.*] She always *treads* on *her* eggs.

EVELYN. Clumsy creature !

CECIL. Not a bit. She does it on purpose. You see, it's much less trouble than *sitting* on them. As soon as she's laid an egg she raises one foot absent-mindedly and gives a warning quack. Whereupon the farmer rushes up, takes it

away, and puts it under some wretched hen, who has to do the sitting for her. I call that genius!

EVELYN. Genius!

CECIL. Yes. Genius is the infinite capacity for making other people take pains.

EVELYN. How can you say that?

CECIL. I didn't. Carlyle did.

EVELYN. I don't believe he said anything of the kind. And I don't believe ducks are clever one bit. They don't look clever.

CECIL. That's part of their cleverness. In this world if one *is* wise one should look like a fool. It puts people off their guard. That's what the duck does.

EVELYN. Well, I think ducks are horrid, and cuckoos too. And I believe most birds *like* bringing up their chickens and feeding them and looking after them.

CECIL. They do. That's the extraordinary part of it. They spend their whole lives building nests and laying eggs and hatching them. And when the chickens come out the father has to fuss round finding worms. And the nest's abominably overcrowded and the babies are perpetually squalling, and that drives the husband to the public-house, and it's all as uncomfortable as the Devil——

EVELYN. Mr. Harburton!

CECIL. Well, *I* shouldn't like it. In fact, I call it fatuous.

[EVELYN *is leaning forward pondering this philosophy with a slightly puckered brow—a slight pause.*]

I say, *you* don't look a bit comfortable like that. Lean back against the tree. It's a first-rate tree. That's why I chose it.

EVELYN [*tries and fails*]. I can't. My hat gets in the way.

CECIL. Take it off then.

EVELYN. I think I will. [*Does so.*] That's better.

[*Leans back luxuriously against the trunk; puts her hat down on bank beside her.*]

CECIL. Much better. [*Looks at her with frank admiration.*] By Jove, you *do* look jolly without your hat!

EVELYN. Do I?

CECIL. Yes. Your hair's such a jolly colour. I noticed it the first time I saw you. You had your hat off then, you know. You were walking through the wood fanning yourself with it. And directly I caught sight of you the sun came out and simply flooded your hair with light. And there was the loveliest pink flush on your cheeks, and your eyes were soft and shining——

EVELYN [*troubled*]. Mr. Harburton, you mustn't say things to me like that.

CECIL. Mustn't I? Why not? Don't you like being told you look jolly?

EVELYN [*naïvely*]. I do *like* it, of course. But *ought* you . . .?

CECIL [*groans*]. Oh, it's *that* again.

EVELYN. I mean it's not *right* for men to say those things to girls.

CECIL. I don't see that—if they're true. You *are* pretty and your eyes *are* soft and your cheeks—why, they're flushing at this moment! [*Triumphant.*] Why shouldn't I say it?

EVELYN. Please! . . .

[*She stops, and her eyes fill with tears.*

CECIL [*much concerned*]. Miss Rivers, what's the matter? Why, I believe you're crying!

EVELYN [*sniffing suspiciously*]. I'm . . . not.

CECIL. You are, I can see the tears. Have I said anything to hurt you? What is it? Tell me.

[*Much concerned.*

EVELYN [*recovering herself by an effort*]. It's nothing. Nothing really. I'm all right now. Only you won't say things to me like that again, will you? Promise.

[*Taking out handkerchief.*

CECIL. I promise . . . if you really wish it. And

now dry your eyes and let's be good children. That's what my nurse used to say when my sister and I quarrelled. Shall I dry them for you?

[*Takes her handkerchief and does so tenderly.*

EVELYN [*with a little gulp*]. Thank you. [*Takes away handkerchief.*] How absurd you are! [*Puts it away.*

CECIL. Thank *you!*

[EVELYN *moves down, sitting at the bottom of the bank, a little below him.*]

EVELYN. Did you often quarrel with your sister?

CECIL. Perpetually. *And* my brothers. Didn't you?

EVELYN. I never had any.

CECIL. Poor little kid. You must have been rather lonely.

EVELYN [*matter-of-fact*]. There was always Reggie.

CECIL. Reggie?

EVELYN. My cousin, Reggie Townsend. He lived with us when we were children. His parents were in India.

CECIL [*matter-of-fact*]. So he used to quarrel with you instead.

EVELYN [*shocked*]. Oh no! We *never* quarrelled. At least, Reggie never did. *I* did sometimes.

CECIL. How dull! There's no good in quarrelling if people won't quarrel back.

EVELYN. I don't think there's *any good* in quarrelling at all.

CECIL. Oh yes, there is. There's the making it up again.

EVELYN. Was that why you used to quarrel with your sister?

CECIL. I expect so, though I didn't know it, of course —then. I used to tease her awfully, I remember, and pull her hair. She had awfully jolly hair. Like yours—oh! I forgot, I mustn't say that. Used you to pull Reggie's hair?

EVELYN [*laughing*]. I'm afraid I did sometimes.

CECIL. I was sure of it. How long was he with you?

EVELYN. Till he went to Winchester. And of course he used to be with us in the holidays after that. And he comes to us now whenever he can get away for a few days. He's in his uncle's office in the city. He'll be a partner some day.

CECIL. Poor chap!

EVELYN. *Poor* chap! Mother says he's very *fortunate*.

CECIL. She would. Parents always think it very fortunate when young men have to go to an office every day. I know mine do.

EVELYN. *Do* you go to an office every day?

CECIL. No.

EVELYN [*with dignity*]. Then I don't think you can know much about it, can you?

CECIL [*carelessly*]. I know too much. That's why I don't go.

EVELYN. What *do* you do?

CECIL. I don't do anything. I'm at the Bar.

EVELYN. If you're at the Bar, why are you down here instead of up in London working?

CECIL. Because if I were in London I might possibly get a brief. It's not likely, but it's possible. And if I got a brief I should have to be mugging in chambers, or wrangling in a stuffy court, instead of sitting under a tree in the shade with you.

EVELYN. But *ought* you to waste your time like that?

CECIL [*genuinely shocked*]. *Waste* my time! To sit under a tree—a really nice tree like this—talking to *you*. You call that *wasting time!*

EVELYN. Isn't it?

CECIL. No! To sit in a frowsy office adding up figures when the sky's blue and the weather's heavenly, *that's* wasting time. The only real way in which one can waste time is not to enjoy it, to spend one's day blinking

at a ledger and never notice how beautiful the world is, and how good it is to be alive. To be only making money when one might be making love, *that* is wasting time!

EVELYN. How earnestly you say that!

[CECIL *leans forward—close to her.*]

CECIL. Isn't it true?

EVELYN [*troubled*]. Perhaps it is.

[*Looks away from him.*

CECIL. You know it is. Every one knows it. Only people won't admit it. [*Leaning towards her and looking into her eyes.*] You know it at this moment.

EVELYN [*returning his gaze slowly*]. I think I do.

[*For a long moment they look into each other's eyes. Then he takes her two hands, draws her slowly towards him and kisses her gently on the lips.*]

CECIL. Ah!

[*Sigh of satisfaction. He releases her hands and leans back against the tree again.*]

EVELYN [*sadly*]. Oh, Mr. Harburton, you *oughtn't* to have done that!

CECIL. Why not?

EVELYN. Because . . . [*hesitates*]. Because you *oughtn't*. . . . Because men *oughtn't* to kiss girls.

CECIL [*scandalised*]. Oughtn't to kiss girls! What nonsense! What on earth were girls made for if not to be kissed?

EVELYN. I mean they *oughtn't* . . . unless . . .

[*Looking away.*

CECIL [*puzzled*]. Unless?

EVELYN [*looking down*]. Unless they *love* them.

CECIL [*relieved*]. But I *do* love you. Of course I love you. That's why I kissed you.

[*A thrush is heard calling in the distance.*]

EVELYN. Really?

[CECIL *nods.* EVELYN *sighs contentedly.*]

That makes it all right then.

CECIL. I should think it did. And as it's all right I may kiss you again, mayn't I?

EVELYN [*shyly*]. If you like.

CECIL. You darling! [*Takes her in his arms and kisses her long and tenderly.*] Lean your head on my shoulder, you'll find it awfully comfortable. [*He leans back against the tree.*]

[*She does so.*]

There! Is that all right?

EVELYN. Quite. [*Sigh of contentment.*

CECIL. *How* pretty your hair is! I always thought your hair lovely. And it's as soft as silk. I always knew it would be like silk. [*Strokes it.*] Do you like me to stroke your hair?

EVELYN. Yes!

CECIL. Sensible girl! [*Pause; he laughs happily.*] I say, what am I to call you? Do you know, I don't even know your Christian name yet?

EVELYN. Don't you?

CECIL. No. You've never told me. What is it? Mine's Cecil.

EVELYN. Mine's Evelyn.

CECIL. Evelyn? Oh, I don't like Evelyn. It's rather a *stodgy* sort of name. I think I shall call you Eve. Does anyone else call you Eve?

EVELYN. No.

CECIL. Then I shall certainly call you Eve. After the first woman man ever loved. May I?

EVELYN. If you like,—Cecil.

CECIL. That's settled then. [*He kisses her again. Pause of utter happiness, during which he settles her head*

more comfortably on his shoulder, and puts his arm round her.] Isn't it heavenly to be in love?

EVELYN. Heavenly!

CECIL. There's nothing like it in the whole world. Love is the most beautiful thing in the whole world! Say so.

EVELYN. Love is the most beautiful thing in the whole world.

CECIL. Good girl! There's a reward for saying it right. [*Kisses her.*

[*Pause of complete happiness for both.*]

EVELYN [*meditatively*]. I'm afraid Reggie won't be pleased.

[*The chatter of sparrows is heard.*]

CECIL [*indifferently*]. Won't he?

EVELYN [*shakes her head*]. No. You see, Reggie's in love with me too. He always has been in love with me, for years and years. [*Sighs.*] Poor Reggie!

CECIL. On the contrary. Happy Reggie!

EVELYN [*astonished*]. What *do* you mean?

CECIL. To have been in love with you years and years. *I've* only been in love with you a week. . . . I've only known you a week.

EVELYN. I'm afraid Reggie didn't look at it like that.

CECIL [*nods*]. No brains.

EVELYN. You see, I always refused *him.*

CECIL. Exactly. And he always went on loving you. What more could the silly fellow want?

EVELYN [*shyly, looking up at him*]. He *wanted* me to accept him, I suppose.

[*The bird chatter dies away.*]

CECIL. Ah! . . . Reggie ought to read Keats's "Ode to a Grecian Urn." . . . I say, what jolly eyes

you've got! I noticed them the moment we met here in the wood. That was why I spoke to you.

EVELYN [*demurely*]. I thought it was to ask your way back to the inn.

CECIL. That was an excuse. I knew the way as well as you did. I'd only just come from there. But when I saw you with the sunshine on your pretty soft hair and lighting up your pretty soft eyes, I said I *must* speak to her. And I did. Are you glad I spoke to you?

EVELYN. Yes.

CECIL. Glad and glad?

EVELYN. Yes.

CECIL. Good girl! [*Leans over and kisses her cheek.*

EVELYN [*sigh of contentment; sits up*]. And now we must go and tell mother.

CECIL [*with a comic groan*]. Need we?

EVELYN [*brightly*]. Of course.

CECIL [*sigh*]. Well, if *you* think so.

EVELYN [*laughing*]. You don't seem to look forward to it much.

CECIL. I don't. That's the part I always hate.

EVELYN. *Always?*

[*Starts forward and looks at him, puzzled.*

CECIL [*quite unconscious*]. Yes. The going to the parents and all that. Parents really are the most preposterous people. They've no feeling for *romance* whatever. You meet a girl in a wood. It's May. The sun's shining. There's not a cloud in the sky. She's adorably pretty. You fall in love. Everything heavenly! Then—why, I can't imagine—she wants you to tell her mother. Well, you do tell her mother. And her mother at once begins to ask you what your profession is, and how much money you earn, and how much money you have that you don't earn—and that spoils it all.

EVELYN [*bewildered*]. But I don't understand. You talk as if you had actually done all this before.

CECIL. So I have. Lots of times.

EVELYN. Oh!

[*Jumps up from the ground and faces him, her eyes flashing with rage.*]

CECIL. I say, don't get up. It's not time to go yet. It's only four. Sit down again.

EVELYN [*struggling for words*]. Do you mean to say you've been in love with girls before? *Other* girls?

CECIL [*apparently genuinely astonished at the question*]. Of course I have.

EVELYN. And been engaged to them?

CECIL. Not engaged. I've never been engaged so far. But I've been in love over and over again.

[EVELYN *stamps her foot with rage—turning away from him.*]

My dear girl, what *is* the matter? You look quite cross.

[*Rises.*

EVELYN [*furious*]. And you're not even *ashamed* of it?

CECIL [*roused to sit up by this question*]. Ashamed of it? Ashamed of being in love? How can you say such a thing! Of course I'm not ashamed. What's the good of being alive at all if one isn't to be in love? I'm perpetually in love. In fact, I'm hardly ever out of love—with somebody.

EVELYN [*still furious*]. Then if you're in love, why don't you get engaged? A man has no business to make love to a girl and not be engaged to her. It's not right.

CECIL [*reasoning with her*]. That's the parents' fault. I told you parents were preposterous people. They won't allow me to get engaged.

EVELYN. Why not?

CECIL. Oh, for different reasons. They say I'm not *serious* enough. Or that I don't work enough. Or that I haven't got enough money. Or else they simply say they "don't think I'm fitted to make their daughter happy."

Anyhow, they won't sanction an engagement. They all agree about *that*. Your mother would be just the same.

[*Impatient exclamation from* EVELYN.]

I don't blame her. I don't say she's not right. I don't say they haven't all been right. In fact, I believe they *have* been right. I'm only explaining how it is.

EVELYN [*savagely*]. *I* see how it is. You don't really want to be married.

CECIL. Of course I don't *want* to be married. Nobody does unless he's perfectly idiotic. One wants to be in love. Being in love's splendid. And I dare say being engaged isn't bad—though I've had no experience of that so far. But being married must be simply hateful.

EVELYN [*boiling with rage*]. Nonsense! How can it be hateful to be married if it's splendid to be in love?

[*The cuckoo is heard.*]

CECIL. Have you forgotten the cuckoo?

EVELYN. Oh!!!

CECIL. No ties, no responsibilities, no ghastly little villa with children bellowing in the nursery. Just life in the open hedgerow. Life and love. Happy cuckoo!

EVELYN [*furious*]. I think cuckoos detestable. They're mean, horrid, *disgusting* birds.

CECIL. No. No. I can't have you abusing cuckoos. They're particular friends of mine. In fact, I'm a sort of cuckoo myself.

EVELYN [*turning on him*]. Oh, I hate you! I hate you! [*Stamps her foot.*

CECIL [*with quiet conviction*]. You don't.

EVELYN. I do!

CECIL [*shaking his head*]. You don't. [*Quite gravely.*] One never really hates the people one has once loved.

[*He looks into her eyes. For a moment or two she returns his gaze fiercely. Then her eyes fall and they fill with tears.*]

EVELYN [*half crying*]. How horrid you are to say that!

CECIL. Why?

EVELYN. Because it's true, I suppose. Oh, I'm so unhappy! [*Begins to cry.*

CECIL [*genuinely distressed*]. Eve! You're crying. You mustn't do that. I can't bear seeing people cry. [*Lays hand on her shoulder.*

EVELYN [*shaking it off*]. Don't. I can't bear you to touch me. After falling in love with one girl after another like that. When I thought you were only in love with me.

CECIL. So I am only in love with you—now.

EVELYN [*tearfully*]. But I thought you'd never been in love with anyone else. And I let you call me Eve because you said she was the first woman man ever loved.

CECIL. But I never said she was the only one, did I? [*Argumentatively.*] And one can't *help* being in love with people when one *is* in love, can one? I couldn't *help* falling in love with you, for instance, the moment I saw you. You looked simply splendid. It was such a splendid day too. *Of course* I fell in love with you.

EVELYN [*slightly appeased by this compliment, drying her eyes*]. But you seem to fall in love with such a lot of people.

CECIL. I do. [*Mischievously.*] But ought *you* to throw stones at me! After all, being in love with more than one person is no worse than having more than one person in love with you. How about Reggie?

EVELYN. Reggie?

[*The sparrows' chatter starts again.*]

CECIL [*nods*]. Reggie's in love with you, isn't he? So am I. And both at once too! I'm only in love with one person at a time.

EVELYN [*rebelliously*]. I can't help Reggie being in love with me.

CECIL. And I can't help *my* being in love with you. That's just my point. I knew you'd see it.

EVELYN. I don't see it at all. Reggie is quite different from you. Reggie's love is true and constant . . .

CECIL. Well, I'm a *constant* lover if you come to that.

EVELYN. You aren't. You know you aren't.

CECIL. Yes, I am. A constant lover is a lover who is constantly in love.

EVELYN. Only with the same person.

CECIL. It doesn't say so. It only says constant.

EVELYN [*half laughing*]. How ridiculous you are!

[*Turns away.*

CECIL [*sigh of relief*]. That's right. Now you're good-tempered again.

EVELYN. I'm not.

CECIL. What a story!

EVELYN. I'm not. I'm very, *very* angry.

CECIL. That's impossible. You can't possibly be angry and laugh at the same time, can you? No one can. And you *did* laugh. You're doing it now.

[*She does so unwillingly.*]

So don't let's quarrel any more. It's absurd to quarrel on such a fine day, isn't it? Let's make it up, and be lovers again.

[*The sparrows die away.*]

EVELYN [*shaking her head*]. No.

CECIL. Please!

EVELYN [*shaking her head*]. No.

CECIL. Well, you're very foolish. Love isn't a thing to throw away. It's too precious for that. Love is the most beautiful thing in the whole world. You said so yourself not ten minutes ago.

EVELYN. I didn't. You said it. [*Looking down.*

CECIL. But you said it after me. [*Gently and gravely.*]

Eve, dear, don't be silly. Let's be in love while we can. Youth is the time to be in love, isn't it? Soon you and I will be dull and stupid and middle-aged like all the other tedious people. And then it will be too late. Youth passes so quickly. Don't let's waste a second of it. They say the May-fly only lives for one day. He is born in the morning. All the afternoon he flutters over the river in the sunshine, dodging the trout and flirting with other May-flies. And at evening he dies. Think of the poor May-fly who happens to be born on a wet day! The tragedy of it!

EVELYN [*softly*]. Poor May-fly.

CECIL. There! You're sorry for the May-fly, you see. You're only angry with me.

EVELYN. Because you're not a May-fly.

CECIL. Yes, I am. A sort of May-fly.

EVELYN [*with suspicion of tears in her voice*]. You aren't. How can you be? Besides, you said you were a cuckoo just now.

CECIL. I suppose I'm a cuckoo-May-fly. For I *hate* wet days. And if you're going to cry again, it might just as well be wet, mightn't it? So do dry your eyes like a good girl. Let me do it for you. [*Does it with her handkerchief.*]

[*She laughs ruefully.*]

There, that's better. And now we're going to be good children again, aren't we?

EVELYN [*giving in*]. Yes.

CECIL [*holding out his hand*]. And you'll kiss me and be friends?

EVELYN. I'll be friends, of course. [*Sadly.*] But you must never kiss me again.

CECIL. What a shame! Why not?

EVELYN. Because you mustn't.

CECIL [*cheerfully*]. Well, you'll sit down again anyhow, won't you? just to show we've made it up.

[*Moves towards tree.*

EVELYN [*shakes head*]. No.

CECIL [*disappointed; turns*]. Ah! . . . Then you haven't really made it up.

EVELYN. Yes, I have. [*Picks up her hat.*] But I must go now. Reggie's coming down by the five-o'clock train, and I want to be at the station to meet him. [*Holds out her hand.*] Good-bye, Mr. Harburton.

CECIL [*taking her hand*]. Eve! You're going to accept Reggie! [*Pause.*

EVELYN [*half to herself*]. I wonder.

CECIL. And *he'll* have to tell your mother?

EVELYN. Of course.

CECIL [*drops her hand*]. Poor Reggie! So *his* romance ends too!

EVELYN. It won't. If I marry Reggie I shall make him very happy.

CECIL. Very likely. Marriage may be happiness, but I'm hanged if it's romance!

EVELYN. Oh!

[*Exclamation of impatience. She turns away and exits.* CECIL *watches her departure with a smile, half amused, half pained, till she is long out of sight. Then with half a sigh he turns back to his tree.*]

CECIL [*reseating himself*]. Poor Reggie!

[*Reopens his book and settles himself to read again. A cuckoo hoots loudly from a distant thicket and is answered by another.* CECIL *looks up from his book to listen as the Curtain falls.*]

CURTAIN.

THOMPSON

BY ST. JOHN HANKIN & GEORGE CALDERON

Though *Thompson* is not the result of a collaboration, I hope that it has something of the effect that St. John Hankin and I would have got if we had worked on it together.

Soon after his death, Mrs. Hankin sent me the MS. of the play as he had left it, and asked me to finish it. It was entitled *Thompson's Escape: A Rather Heartless Comedy.* Act I was written out with a certain air of finality; the rest was a pretty full sketch, covering some twenty pages. I agreed with pleasure, because it was the sort of comedy-scheme that I should have liked to invent myself.

I allowed myself full liberty in dealing with his notes; carried out some of his directions (such as "Jim—vague—drift—explains philosophy of drift—see what turns up"); and modified others that did not fit in with the central notion as I saw it. Nobody can quite fulfil another man's intention; besides, a playwright can never tell how his idea is going to "pan out" till he has finished with it. The middle and end are bound to have a retroactive effect on the beginning, and Hankin himself would probably have altered many things which had an air of being settled.

In the original draft the scene of the first Act was laid by Hankin in the Lounge of a riverside hotel. Helen was a more matter-of-fact young lady than I have made her. Gerald was in the Navy. Miss Latimer was "Mrs." and his mother. Instead of a lion-tamer and a lion, there was a cockney stranger rescued by Gerald from drowning; and there was none of this plainly artificial business about an uncle leaving property—a pardonable piece of stage apparatus, I hope, for getting through with the business of plot where character, not plot, is the main thing.

If something of the fine dry Hankin flavour has been lost in the course of treatment, his admirers must forgive it as inevitable. Nobody regrets it more than his fellow-author,

G. C.

PERSONS OF THE PLAY

Mrs. Vaughan.
Helen, *her stepdaughter.*
Miss Latimer.
Gerald, *her nephew.*
James.
Frohock.
Two Parlourmaids, Two Countrymen.

The action passes at a small house at Maidenhead.

THOMPSON

ACT I

SCENE.—*The drawing-room. It is noon on a sunny day in June, and the shady corners of the room are full of warm reflections from the garden, which is visible through the open French window.*

When the curtain rises, the only occupant of the room is HELEN VAUGHAN, *a romantic-looking girl of about* 22, *who is reading on the sofa.*

MRS. VAUGHAN [*off*]. Don't be long, dear Miss Latimer. . . . You'll find me in the drawing-room.

Enter MRS. VAUGHAN, *a pretty woman of about* 35, *charmingly dressed in summery garments and an elegant feathery hat. Her smile is sweet, her manner amiable, and her total effect is charming.*

So *there* you are, my dear ! Such a lovely morning ! Miss Latimer and I are just going for a little stroll. One really ought to get out before lunch if one can, if only to get up an appetite, oughtn't one ? I do so hate sitting down to a good lunch and having no appetite. Won't you come too ?

HELEN. No thank you, Mamma. I think I shall stay indoors. I am feeling rather lazy this morning.

MRS. VAUGHAN. Well, that's always a pleasant feeling, isn't it ? Laziness may be wrong, but it certainly is very pleasant. . . .

Enter GERALD *by the window, in knickerbockers, carrying a bag of golf-clubs. A tall, handsome sunburnt soldier of about 30; very simple, very straightforward, rather slow in thought and speech; the heroic type.*

Ah, *there* you are, Captain Latimer! So you've been playing golf already. Well, I hope you won your game. Though no doubt I ought not to ask, for if you've lost you won't want to say, and if you've won you'll be too modest. I and Miss Latimer are just going out to take a little turn.

Enter MISS LATIMER, *a rather grim and masculine old maid of 60; kind-hearted, strong-featured, deep-voiced, ill-dressed and out-spoken.*

[*To* GERALD.] Won't you come too?

GERALD. Many thanks. I should have liked it very much; but the fact is . . . I've got to clean my golf-clubs.

MISS LATIMER. I hope I haven't kept you waiting?

MRS. VAUGHAN. Not at all. We've plenty of time. And what is it like out, Captain Latimer? Not windy, I hope.

GERALD. There's a little breeze, that's all.

Exit GERALD.

MRS. VAUGHAN. How tiresome! It will ruin my hat.

MISS LATIMER. You can change it if you want, you know.

MRS. VAUGHAN. I think I'd rather risk it than take such a desperate measure as that. So come along. [*To* HELEN.] Good-bye for the present, my dear; and mind you're not dull without us. Come, dear Miss Latimer.

HELEN. Good-bye; enjoy yourselves.

MRS. VAUGHAN. That I'm sure we shall.

MISS LATIMER. Which way? Down by the river?

MRS. VAUGHAN. Oh, nowhere near the circus, I beg;

there are the most dreadful animals roaring in the menagerie there ; it really is too alarming.

[*Exeunt* MRS. VAUGHAN *and* MISS LATIMER. HELEN *goes to the window and waves after them.*]

[*Without.*] No, I propose that we go up through the beechwoods and examine the really enchanting windmill. . . .

[MRS. VAUGHAN'S *voice dies away.* HELEN *returns from the window, looks in the glass and puts a hairpin into its place. Tucks up her legs on the sofa and returns with a sigh to her book. Re-enter* GERALD.]

GERALD. Am I disturbing you ?

HELEN. Not at all. Please come in.

GERALD. I have been guilty of a deception, Miss Vaughan. When I said that I had to clean my golf-clubs, that was a subterfuge. My caddie had already cleaned them. I wanted to be alone with you. Are you sure that I am not disturbing you ?

HELEN. Quite sure. I was only reading.

GERALD. A novel, I suppose ?

HELEN. No, I was reading poetry.

GERALD. Poetry ?

HELEN. It is a little volume of Lamartine. I should be very glad to read you some of it if you understand French.

GERALD. At another time I should like it very much indeed, though I do not understand French. But now . . .

HELEN. Now ?

GERALD. I have something to say to you, something very important.

HELEN. Yes ?

GERALD. It is very difficult. I do not know how to begin.

HELEN. Is it something about yourself ?

GERALD. It is about both of us.

HELEN. What can it be?

GERALD. Miss Vaughan, all this fortnight that I have been here I have been like a man in a dream . . . yes, like a man in a dream. I have not known you for long, that is true. . . .

HELEN. About a fortnight.

GERALD. Yes. When my Aunt first wrote to me that her friend, Mrs. Vaughan, with whom she was sharing a cottage in the country for the summer, had a stepdaughter, I felt something queer, a sort of presentiment, at once. When she invited me to come down here to stay, I knew that I was in for it. Every day since I have known you it has got worse and worse. . . . Miss Vaughan, I see in you all the most exquisite qualities of womanhood. I love you with all the love that my heart is capable of; I adore you; everything is changed for me since I have known you, the world, life, everything.

HELEN. Stop, stop!

GERALD. Are you angry with me?

HELEN. Of course not. Why should I be angry with you? But let me stop you before you get any further. I like you very much, Captain Latimer.

GERALD. Oh!

HELEN. Almost as much as anyone I know . . .

GERALD. You are saying that only to be kind?

HELEN. No, I say it because I mean it. You say that you love me, you are going to ask me to love you in return. . . .

GERALD. To marry me. . . .

HELEN. It is the same thing.

GERALD. Very nearly.

HELEN. But it is impossible. I can never marry anyone.

GERALD. *You* never marry anyone?

HELEN. No, there was a man once, but he is dead.

GERALD. Oh, if I had known. . . .

HELEN. How could you? I never talk about it. But since then I feel that I can never belong to anyone but him. I shall always love him, and be faithful to him. I wear this locket in memory of him.

GERALD. Is that his hair?

HELEN. No, but I like to think it is; it is the same colour.

GERALD. Oh, Miss Vaughan, it is dreadful to feel that you have been through a great sorrow like this; you who should be sheltered from every kind of grief or harm. But if ever, as time passes, you should come to feel the burden of your solitude too much to bear . . .

HELEN. Do you imagine I could ever forget a man whom I have loved like that?

GERALD. Not forget him of course. But I thought that perhaps, some day . . .

HELEN. Please say no more. I cannot listen to you when you talk like that; it seems like being false to him.

GERALD. But I only mean . . .

HELEN. You can hardly understand how I feel about him I suppose. You are a man; and I don't think men feel things so deeply as women.

GERALD. But you mustn't imagine . . .

HELEN. If you understood you would never think that I could change or come to love anyone else. When a woman loves it is for ever; at least, I know that it is so with me.

GERALD. But really, Miss Vaughan . . .

HELEN. You are like Papa. Papa imagined that after a year or two I should forget. He believed that James would forget.

GERALD. Oh, that was impossible, I am sure.

HELEN. Who can say? But he had no time; in three weeks he was gone. Let us always be friends, close friends; but only promise me one thing, never, never, to speak to me of love again.

GERALD. Oh, Miss Vaughan, if you forbid me, I have, of course, no alternative but to obey.

HELEN. Thank you.

GERALD. But remember, if ever you want a friend to go anywhere or do anything for you, anything in the world, I am always there.

HELEN. Thank you, thank you. . . . Some other time I will tell you more about James; but just now let us talk of something else.

GERALD. Yes, let us talk of something else. Give me one moment first, to collect my thoughts.

MRS. VAUGHAN [*without*]. Completely ruined, my dear; three pounds positively thrown into the gutter.

Enter MRS. VAUGHAN *and* MISS LATIMER *by the window.*

Oh, Captain Latimer, what a wicked man you are! *Why* did you tell me it was a nice day with no wind?

GERALD. I think I said there was a little breeze.

MRS. VAUGHAN. A little breeze! It's a perfect gale. We positively had to run for shelter, didn't we? And East-windy too, which is of all winds the wind that I most detest. It ruins one's temper and one's hat.

[MRS. VAUGHAN *takes off her hat and looks at the apparently unruffled plumage regretfully.*]

Look at that!

GERALD. Is it damaged much?

MRS. VAUGHAN. Have you no eyes?

MISS LATIMER. You ought to have changed it then, as I suggested.

MRS. VAUGHAN. And what would have been the use of that? A wind like this would ruin any hat, even the plainest sailor; and I never wear sailors. They don't suit me, do they, Helen? I look a perfect guy in them. So when it's too windy for my kind of hat I simply have to stay indoors, that's all. Some people pretend to

like wind, I know. There was a poet who actually wrote an ode to the North East Wind ; Kingsley, wasn't it ? It begins : "Welcome, wild North Easter !" Ugh ! fancy, and a clergyman too ! And he couldn't have been sincere about it because he was so sensitive to the cold that he ultimately died of a chill, which was evidently a judgment. Not that people pay any attention to what poets say as a rule. Still, you never know, and there may have been others who suffered through taking the poor gentleman at his word.

GERALD. There may indeed.

MRS. VAUGHAN. And oh, the animals down in the circus were roaring all the time in such a dreadfully alarming fashion we were both frightened out of our wits ; weren't we, dear Miss Latimer ?

MISS LATIMER. Quite.

MRS. VAUGHAN. However, I have no time to talk about poets or animals now. I must hurry to my room and try to repair the ravages of the climate as best I can. Will you come and help me, Helen, my dear ? I am sure it will take at least two of us, to say nothing of my maid, to make me presentable by lunch time.

HELEN. We'll soon put you to rights, Mamma.

MRS. VAUGHAN. Well, I'm glad you're so hopeful, my dear. You're always so useful about straightening things when they're rumpled ; and I always think that's a sort of special gift. Some people have it, and some people haven't. I haven't got it in the least, I'm sorry to say. As long as my things are perfectly new I'm all right.

[*Exeunt* HELEN *and* MRS. VAUGHAN.]

[*Without.*] But directly I've worn them once or twice, and especially if I've been caught in what Captain Latimer is pleased to call a breeze, but I can only describe as an equinoctial gale. . . . [*Her voice dies away.*

[GERALD *sits brooding in a corner.* MISS LATIMER

has settled down and is knitting, as she is during the greater part of the play.]

MISS LATIMER. Thinking, Gerald?

GERALD. Yes.

MISS LATIMER. What about?

GERALD. About golf.

MISS LATIMER. Humph! . . . You certainly don't look like a man who has just come into £1,500 a year.

GERALD. I don't feel like it.

MISS LATIMER. I've been wondering ever since breakfast why I'm not to say anything about your Uncle Jack having left you his money.

GERALD. Oh, I may as well own up. I've just been proposing to Miss Vaughan.

MISS LATIMER. Proposing! [GERALD *nods.* Well, and what did she say?

GERALD. She refused me.

MISS LATIMER. She what?

GERALD. She refused me.

MISS LATIMER. Are you sure?

GERALD. Oh quite, quite sure; there was no mistake about it.

MISS LATIMER. And pray what has that got to do with your Uncle Jack?

GERALD. I didn't want to insult Miss Vaughan by seeming to think that such a paltry question as money could make the least difference to a young lady of her delicacy of feeling.

MISS LATIMER. I see. Well, well, I thought she liked you.

GERALD. I think she does; at least she said so.

MISS LATIMER. Then what's the reason?

GERALD. There's another man.

MISS LATIMER. Another man? I've seen no other man.

GERALD. He died two years ago. She has never got

over it. She says that she feels she can never love anyone else.

MISS LATIMER. Humph! . . . Well, I hope you don't mean to go glooming about the place like a young Hamlet, for if there's one thing that I dislike more than another it's gloomy people; and I'd just as soon you didn't stay with me at all.

GERALD. My dear Aunt, don't imagine that I mean to give way to melancholy. I hope I shall bear my sorrow as becomes a man. It isn't her fault. I don't want to make her miserable by going about looking wretched.

MISS LATIMER. Well, that's a comfort.

GERALD. For the moment I am upset a bit, of course. But I shall go down by the river and walk it off; and in an hour or so I hope to return as if nothing had happened.

MISS LATIMER. Well, mind you're not late for lunch. . . . By the by, now that *that's* over, I suppose I needn't let concealment, like a worm in the bud, prey on my damask cheek any longer?

GERALD. How do you mean?

MISS LATIMER. I can let them know about your Uncle Jack's property?

GERALD. No, please no!

MISS LATIMER. And why not, pray?

GERALD. I shouldn't like to seem as if I were parading my delicacy of feeling in having kept it dark until I had proposed to her.

MISS LATIMER. Well of course they'll guess; for I shall have to go into mourning.

GERALD. Oh no, you mustn't do that.

MISS LATIMER. What, not go into mourning for my own brother-in-law?

GERALD. No please, I really must ask you not to. It would give the whole show away.

MISS LATIMER. But my dear boy!

GERALD. You must promise me that, Aunt Harriet.

MISS LATIMER. But really Gerald, this is bullying. You early Victorian cave-man! Are we toys? Can't I wear what I like?

GERALD. If you put on a black dress I shall go straight back to India. On my word of honour as an officer and a gentleman.

MISS LATIMER. Hoity toity!

MRS. VAUGHAN [*without*]. Just run down and cut me a few roses, there's a dear.

GERALD. You promise?

MISS LATIMER. There's Mrs. Vaughan.

GERALD. I think I'll be off. [*Exit* GERALD.

MRS. VAUGHAN [*without*]. And mind you don't tear your frock among the bushes as I always do. [*Entering by the door.*] Here I am! What a relief to be tidy again.

MISS LATIMER. Was that Helen you were talking to?

MRS. VAUGHAN. Yes, I was just sending her out to get a few roses for the piano.

MISS LATIMER. She seems a most dutiful daughter.

MRS. VAUGHAN. She is indeed; and I always feel like a mother towards her, although she's only a girl, and of course I'm not her real mother, and step-mothers are always expected to beat them, according to the story-books. But then no doubt one shouldn't believe story-books any more than one does poets, should one? Indeed, I sometimes doubt if we ought to believe anything; though if one doesn't . . .

MISS LATIMER. That's a sad story about her engagement.

MRS. VAUGHAN. To Mr. Thompson you mean? Yes, very sad. But that's a long time ago; and these things will happen, won't they? So we must put up with them. Of course it's not so easy to do that when they happen to oneself, but fortunately most things necessarily happen to some one else, and then it's easier, isn't it?

MISS LATIMER. What did you say his name was?

MRS. VAUGHAN. Thompson, James Thompson. All Thompsons seem to be christened James, don't they? Just as all Browns are called Thomas, and all Grants Alexander.

MISS LATIMER. And who *was* this Mr. Thompson?

MRS. VAUGHAN. Oh, he was John's secretary. Though why John should ever have wanted a secretary at all was always a mystery to me; but he says he must have some one to tear up his letters. At first he had a lady to do it, but she was most deplorably good-looking, and in every way quite unsuited for the post. So I naturally insisted on John's getting rid of her and engaging a man instead. But Helen fell in love with him almost directly, which was even worse; at least, John said it was worse. And of course he hadn't a penny; so what would they have had to live on?

MISS LATIMER. But surely, he had his salary as secretary?

MRS. VAUGHAN. Yes, of course. But naturally John paid him as little as he could, because he didn't want to pauperise him. And of course Mr. Thompson did as little work as he could, so as not to pauperise John. So you see that left him all the more time for Helen; and he really was quite nice-looking of a kind, which was a pity no doubt, but what can you do? And the upshot of it was that John went back to having a lady secretary again, though I am glad to say a very painstaking Scotchwoman of about forty-five.

MISS LATIMER. And why did Mr. Thompson go away?

MRS. VAUGHAN. Well, you see, I had found out all about it, because I happened to come into the room while he was kissing her hand, and naturally I told John, and when it appeared that there was nothing for them to live on, I insisted on John telling them that the engagement must be broken off at once.

MISS LATIMER. Well?

MRS. VAUGHAN. Well, they were both very nice about

it and saw John's point of view ; for it's quite plain that young people must have money nowadays or else they'd starve ; and old people too for the matter of that. Don't you think we acted for the best ?

MISS LATIMER. I think you acted like a pair of brutes.

MRS. VAUGHAN. Brutes ?

MISS LATIMER. There they might have been happily married ; instead of which . . . Why didn't your husband pay this Mr. Thompson enough ?

MRS. VAUGHAN. Well, if he took it I suppose it was enough, or he wouldn't have taken it. We didn't force him to be John's secretary, you know.

MISS LATIMER. If your husband wanted a secretary he ought to have paid him a big enough salary to marry on, otherwise he was being underpaid. How are young men to marry if they aren't paid enough to marry on ? And how is the country to go on if young men can't marry, I should like to know ?

MRS. VAUGHAN. Well I'm sure I don't know. It's no good asking me. But at any rate one thing was certain ; *John* didn't mean to give them any money, and there was an end of it as far as he was concerned ; for, once John makes up his mind about a thing, you can talk yourself black in the face but it won't affect *him*. So there they were ! And however much you may theorise, one does so hate being hungry and having to do without things ; at least I do, though they say that the poor get used to it, which is certainly a fortunate thing, for us at any rate. So Mr. Thompson went away, and the next thing we heard of him was that he was drowned.

MISS LATIMER. Drowned ?

MRS. VAUGHAN. Well, practically.

MISS LATIMER. Practically drowned ?

MRS. VAUGHAN. Yes, in the *Gothenburg*, on the way to America. John advised him to go to America ; he said there were so many openings there. Not that John knew

anything at all about America ; still, he advised him to go, and I quite agreed with him ; for of course the further off he went the better for all parties. So Mr. Thompson took his advice ; and when the ship was wrecked he was . . .

MISS LATIMER. Practically drowned.

MRS. VAUGHAN. Exactly.

MISS LATIMER. And hasn't she got over it yet ?

MRS. VAUGHAN. No. You see the circumstances of his death were rather romantic, and anything like romance appeals irresistibly to Helen. When the ship went down he might have saved himself quite easily ; he seems to have been a splendid swimmer. But instead of that he devoted himself to saving other people ; he rescued three of the women by swimming with them till the boats were able to pick them up ; and it was in trying to rescue a fourth that he lost his own life, for up came a shark and of course that was the end of *him.* Poor Helen was dreadfully upset and subscribed to a Press Cutting Agency which sent her extracts from all the newspapers giving accounts of what Mr. Thompson had done ; and there she lay on a sofa for weeks, pasting them all into an album and reading them over and over again. We tried every sort of thing to rouse her, change of scene, Teneriffe, Broadstairs, tincture of quinine ; nothing was any use. And since then she spends her time reading the most depressing poetry that she can find and playing the piano with both pedals down, and vows she will never marry at all, which is naturally very annoying for us.

MISS LATIMER. Then you wanted her to marry ?

MRS. VAUGHAN. Well you see, John and I both agree that grown-up girls are really rather a nuisance than otherwise about the house. Not, of course, that dear Helen isn't a sweet child and makes herself most useful, but still it would be more satisfactory for all parties if once she were comfortably settled. And I should never have offered

any opposition to this match with Mr. Thompson if I had imagined she was going to be like that ; and really would rather that she had been happy with the man she loved, or at any rate a widow, however poor, than treat the house as a kind of nunnery or nursing home.

MISS LATIMER. I should think so indeed !

MRS. VAUGHAN. But there's no calculating on girls. For if ever there was one that I had expected to be like other girls it was Helen, instead of which she turns out quite feminine like they used to be in the early Victorian days ; though really from all one hears one hardly knows if people in the early Victorian days were half as early Victorian as we have always been led to suppose they were.

MISS LATIMER. I have no patience with her ; I should like to shake her.

MRS. VAUGHAN. I'm sure I'm delighted to hear you say so.

MISS LATIMER. I call her a romantic idiot to go maundering on like this for two years over a man that's dead. When you and your old curmudgeon of a husband refused to let her marry this Thompson, if she had had any spirit she ought to have run away with him at once.

MRS. VAUGHAN. But isn't that romantic ?

MISS LATIMER. Not a bit ; that's practical common sense.

Enter GERALD *at window.*

Well, Gerald, what is it ?

GERALD. I say, I hope you won't mind . . .

MISS LATIMER. What has happened ?

GERALD. The fact is, I met a chap I know down by the river . . .

MRS. VAUGHAN. Then I hope you asked him in to lunch.

GERALD. That's just it.

MRS. VAUGHAN. How delightful. I always think it

is so much more amusing to see strangers at meals than people one knows quite well. Though of course one's supposed to like one's own friends and relations best; still, it isn't a matter of affection when you're eating.

GERALD. Well, I'm glad you don't mind.

[*Exit* GERALD.

MRS. VAUGHAN. And now I must go and find the glasses to put Helen's roses in. And you, dear Miss Latimer?

MISS LATIMER. What about me?

MRS. VAUGHAN. Aren't you going to titivate at all?

MISS LATIMER. Well, perhaps I'd better go and put my hat straight.

MRS. VAUGHAN. I should; or take it off.

[*Exeunt talking.*

And I must say I think it's very talented of your nephew to come across a friend when he's out walking in such a very out-of-the-way little place as this; for who would have supposed . . . [*Voice dies away.*

Enter GERALD *and* JAMES *by the window.* JAMES *is a cool-looking individual of about* 30, *dressed in flannels, and carrying a French novel.*

GERALD. Don't be shy, old chap, there's no one here.

JAMES. Will my punt be all right?

GERALD. As safe as a house.

JAMES. I oughtn't really to be here at all; I promised to lunch with the Bertrams up at Road's End. But it doesn't really matter; I'll go there some other day.

GERALD. How funny our meeting again like this. I thought you'd settled in America.

JAMES. So I have; but I came over on business.

GERALD. Business?

JAMES. Yes, I and another chap, a man named Balgarnie; such a ripper; you ought to meet him; we've got a mine we found in Mexico, at least he found it. We're

over here trying to float it as a company, at least he is. . . .

GERALD. Well, I am glad you have come down here.

JAMES. The fact is, I ought to be helping Balgarnie ; but I met a man in town who was coming down here for the week-end ; oh, such a nice chap, you can't think ! So I just ran down. . . . And what are you doing here ?

GERALD [*his face falling*]. Oh, I've been playing golf.

JAMES. And what does the household consist of ?

GERALD. My dear chap, there's the loveliest creature here that you ever saw. Oh, if you only knew . . .

MRS. VAUGHAN [*without*]. My dear Miss Latimer, I only wish that my hats took so little time to take on and off as yours do.

JAMES. Who the devil's that ?

GERALD. That's her mother.

Enter MRS. VAUGHAN *and* MISS LATIMER. MRS. VAUGHAN *carries two flower vases full of water which she puts down on the table.*

Let me introduce my friend, Mr. Thompson ; Jimmy Thompson who was up with me at . . .

JAMES. Mrs. Vaughan ! I thought as much.

MRS. VAUGHAN [*shrieking and falling on the sofa*]. Ah ! It's him.

MISS LATIMER. Gracious ! Who's him ?

MRS. VAUGHAN. Mr. Thompson who was drowned ; Helen's *fiancé* ; the man who was eaten by a shark.

JAMES. Eaten by a shark.

GERALD. You, Thompson ?

JAMES. I assure you I was never eaten by a shark.

MISS LATIMER. She's fainting.

GERALD. Good heavens !

MISS LATIMER. Quick, some water ! Put up her legs ! Throw it in her face.

MRS. VAUGHAN. No, no ! I'm all right. Only when

somebody you know lies mouldering at the bottom of the Atlantic, suddenly turns up in flannels in a drawing-room, and offers to shake hands with you, it's apt to be rather a shock. [*Sitting up.*] But I must go and warn Helen, or this will be too much for her, poor child. I must break it to her gently bit by bit.

MISS LATIMER. Stay where you are; I'll do it.

MRS. VAUGHAN. No, no; let me go. I can't trust anybody but myself.

Enter HELEN *at the window with her arms full of roses.*

Helen, here's Mr. Thompson turned up again!

HELEN. Ah! [*Dropping all her roses and holding out both hands to* JAMES.] You, James?

JAMES. Miss Vaughan? How delightful to meet you here. This is simply ripping.

HELEN. Then you weren't drowned after all?

JAMES. Drowned? Of course not. Why should I be drowned?

HELEN. In the wreck.

JAMES. What wreck?

HELEN. The *Gothenburg*.

JAMES. Me? But I never was on the *Gothenburg*.

HELEN. Then you weren't in the shipwreck at all.

JAMES. No, not in any shipwreck.

HELEN. But the papers said you were.

JAMES. Said *I* was?

HELEN. Yes, you, James Thompson. They said you saved three lives and perished in the act of trying to save another.

JAMES. The deuce they did! What a lark! Well, it must have been some other Thompson, that's all.

HELEN. Well, it *is* nice to see you again!

MRS. VAUGHAN. Goodness, how quietly the child takes it. I thought at least you'd faint, as I did, very nearly.

HELEN. I'm much too happy to faint.

JAMES. Fancy my finding you all again like this ; it really is ripping ! [*A bell rings.*

MRS. VAUGHAN. Well, any way, there's the lunch-bell ; and as it's a joint, the sooner we go in the better ; for to my mind there's nothing so apt to spoil a good leg of mutton as waiting in the cold till it's all little lumps of fat swimming about in the gravy like the people in that shipwreck in which it appears that Mr. Thompson didn't take any part after all.

[*During this speech the characters form procession and make for the door to go to lunch.*]

CURTAIN.

ACT II

An hour later. In the garden under the shade of a big tree. JAMES, HELEN, MRS. VAUGHAN, GERALD. JAMES *is reading aloud from a scrap-book of newspaper cuttings.* HELEN *and* MRS. VAUGHAN *listen with rapt attention and utter exclamations of delight and horror at the most thrilling places.*

JAMES. "And now when it seemed at last that thanks to Thompson's exertions all had been safely got into the boats and the word was about to be given to bend to the oars, a thrill of horror ran round the company as a woman's figure suddenly emerged upon the taffrail of the sinking ship, making desperate gestures of appeal."

Enter two PARLOURMAIDS *with coffee and milk.*

Coffee, hurrah! I love a cup of coffee after lunch.

HELEN. Don't stop.

JAMES. Where was I? Ha! "It was the Captain's wife who, having been confined to the sick bay by an attack of fever, had been forgotten in the confusion of the moment." Eh! That was very careless of the Captain to forget her; after being so careful too about the pickled pork and whisky.

HELEN. Go on.

JAMES. "Thompson, though still panting from his recent exertions . . ."

Enter MISS LATIMER, *knitting.*

MISS LATIMER. Hm! Mr. Thompson reading to you? What is it?

MRS. VAUGHAN. Sh! It's Helen's newspaper cuttings about the shipwreck.

JAMES. Now, you listen to this, Miss Latimer; it is most impressive.

HELEN. Go on, go on.

JAMES. You don't mind my cigarette? "Thompson, though still panting from his recent exertions, soaked and shivering from his immersion, leaped to his feet to perform still one more feat of heroism." Too many feet there; it doesn't scan.

HELEN. Don't make comments, but go on.

JAMES. "For one moment the intrepid hero stood gazing towards the frantic form that stood beckoning him to his death . . ."

HELEN. Ah!

JAMES. That's ripping, isn't it? "Beckoning him to his death. . . . Behind him lay safety . . ."

HELEN. Ah!

JAMES. "Before him yawned the mighty ocean," . . . evidently bored with the whole proceedings; rather blasé about shipwrecks, don't you know.

HELEN. Give me back the book, James; you're laughing at it.

JAMES. On my word I'm not, er, Helen; I'm as serious as a judge.

HELEN. You have no reverence for the heroic.

JAMES. Haven't I, though? I tell you I feel proud of my name when I think of him standing there with the blood of all the Thompsons coursing through his veins . . .

HELEN. Don't you see how wonderful it was of him, after already twice risking his life, not to think of his own safety, but to go straight back . . .

JAMES. My word, yes!

HELEN. Without even waiting to get his breath . . .

JAMES. His not to reason why,
His not to stop and dry;
Back in the ocean
Plunged Mr. Thompson.

HELEN. Give it here. [*Taking the album.*] I won't have sacred things made fun of.

JAMES. I say, don't be angry. I didn't mean any harm. This is capital coffee of yours, Mrs. Vaughan.

MRS. VAUGHAN. Well, I must say that after all one's heard about the wreck and everything, and how very heroic Mr. Thompson was and met with his death in such an odd way, it is a great disappointment to find it wasn't you after all.

JAMES. You put it so nicely, Mrs. Vaughan, you make me feel almost sorry myself. But, unfortunately, you see I went by the *Heidelberg* instead, because I heard they fed you better there than on the *Gothenburg*; which shows that in spite of the instructive stories to the contrary that we heard in our youth, one isn't always punished for being greedy.

MRS. VAUGHAN. It seems hardly fair to Helen, after joining the Press Cutting Association and everything.

HELEN. Oh, Mamma!

MRS. VAUGHAN. Well, my dear, a guinea's a guinea for all you may say, and the press-cuttings have certainly been a source of great pleasure to all of us, so long as we thought it was *our* Mr. Thompson who was drowned.

JAMES. Oh, I can quite understand it. [*To* HELEN.] Are you quite comfy?

HELEN. Yes, thanks.

JAMES. Have this cushion.

HELEN. No, thanks.

JAMES [*putting it behind his head*]. I wish you would; but if you won't . . .

MRS. VAUGHAN. And now tell us about your life in America.

JAMES. Oh, there's not much to tell.

HELEN. Oh, yes! and the prairies and the buffaloes and the Red Indians. Tell us of some of your adventures in the prairies.

JAMES. The prairies? Oh, that's those big open spaces. Well, I'm rather afraid I didn't have any adventures in the prairies. I was in the towns most of the time.

MRS. VAUGHAN. In the towns?

HELEN. Oh, how does it feel to see your first buffalo?

JAMES. Oh, there aren't any buffaloes out there now.

HELEN. No buffaloes?

JAMES. They're extinct; fizzled out ages ago.

MRS. VAUGHAN. But, my dear Mr. Thompson, don't destroy a world of pleasant illusions for us. No buffaloes?

JAMES. There are only two left. They're in the Zoo in Regent's Park.

HELEN. Only two left!

JAMES. None others genuine: see the signature on the label.

HELEN. But the Red Indians . . .

MRS. VAUGHAN. *They* exist, at any rate.

JAMES. Oh yes, they exist all right. But they wear billycocks and blue serge dittos now, play bridge and ride about in tramcars. You can't tell them from the Irish.

MRS. VAUGHAN. But don't they scalp people?

JAMES. No more than the Irish do; not so much, in fact.

MRS. VAUGHAN. I'm afraid the world has lost half its picturesqueness.

JAMES. Yes, we've come too late. It's rather rough.

HELEN. But what does it matter, so long as it is full of brave men ready to do brave things. You may not have been wrecked or scalped or anything, but if you were, I know that you would show the sort of stuff that you are made of.

JAMES. Ah, I should indeed.

HELEN. I know that you are as brave as a lion.

JAMES. Now, my dear Miss Vaughan, you mustn't make me look ridiculous. You know I couldn't face a field-mouse if it showed fight.

HELEN. Rubbish, James. I know better.

MRS. VAUGHAN. No buffaloes and no Red Indians. . . . Then what did you do when you left New York?

JAMES. Well, you'll hardly believe me, but I worked.

MRS. VAUGHAN. Worked!

JAMES. Flattering incredulity!

HELEN. What work did you do?

JAMES. Oh, anything that came along. I was all sorts of things; such fun! I mined a bit, ranched a bit, was usher in a school for a bit. Then I met a fellow who was going to California, such a nice chap! So I went there for a bit. Then I met Balgarnie, who was going to Mexico, so I went there for a bit. That was when we discovered the mine.

MISS LATIMER. You seem to have gone pretty much where anybody led you.

JAMES. Oh, but you don't know Balgarnie; such a ripper; top-hole! With a devil of a will; I was simply hypnotised.

MISS LATIMER. But haven't you got a will too?

JAMES. Me? Of course I have; you mustn't make fun of me. I'm all will. But Balgarnie's the sort of chap who simply sweeps you off your legs. Some people are like that: magnetism or something.

MRS. VAUGHAN. But hadn't you any plans?

JAMES. Plans? Hundreds of 'em! But somehow or other they never came off; they never do; haven't you noticed that?

MISS LATIMER. Well, I must say, it sounds a poor-spirited backboneless way of going through life to me; but then perhaps I'm old-fashioned.

JAMES. Oh, not a bit! I believe in Providence, that's all; I go where the current floats me. I'm the modern man, the latest thing, the good social animal.

MISS LATIMER. Well, I must say, if that's the latest

thing, I'm glad that I am not modern. I prefer the out-of-date sort of man who sets his mind to a thing and goes on till he gets it.

JAMES. Oh, you like heroes?

HELEN. Of course, James—we *all* do!

JAMES. Well, I can't help feeling sorry for them myself, cast adrift in this unromantic world of ours, with nothing in their line left to do. There's still an armed burglar now and again, or a runaway horse; but very seldom, and generally up the wrong street. The result is that the poor beggars spend most of their lives sitting on office stools, totting up somebody else's profits in a ledger, without ever getting a chance.

MISS LATIMER. Well, I'm only a woman, Mr. Thompson, so no doubt I don't see things so clearly as you do with your masculine mind; but at any rate women will always prefer men who do brave things.

JAMES. Well, you know, the hero doesn't really make much of a husband. They're so often only at their best when there's something heroic to do. There was Aylwin Vavasour for instance. [*To* GERALD.] You remember Carrots? He rescued a good-looking heiress from a mad bull in the most thrilling circumstances. She married him and has regretted it ever since. When there are no mad bulls about he's rather a disagreeable fellow than otherwise to live with; never does a stroke of work, smokes in the drawing-room and puts his legs on the mantelpiece. Or take Toby Strutt who knocked a man down in Oxford Street for being rude to a lady; and was fined twenty shillings or a month at Vine Street for disorderly behaviour. No! the fighting instinct is out of place in this police-ridden civilisation of ours. It's all very sad; but I'm afraid we've got to put up with the world as we find it. Now tell us something about yourself, Latimer, old chap. What have *you* been doing all this time?

GERALD. Oh, nothing much.

MISS LATIMER [*proudly*]. Gerald has received the D.S.O. for service on the Afghan frontier.

JAMES. Ah, yes, there's still a corner there. Congratters, old chap. Are you going back?

GERALD. In two or three months.

JAMES. You'd better hurry up. I hear the Afghans are all taking to pianolas and goloshes.

MISS LATIMER. Half-past two! I'm going to walk three times round the shrubbery and then settle down somewhere and get a little serious knitting done.

MRS. VAUGHAN [*to* MISS LATIMER]. Come back here. I'll get rid of the others. I want to have a good talk with you.

Exit MISS LATIMER.

Now I am sure that you two old schoolfellows must have a thousand things to say to each other; schoolfellows always have; and most of them, of course, quite unfit for ladies to hear. So don't you think it would be a good idea if you went for a walk?

JAMES. Ai! We'll go for a walk, old chap.

MRS. VAUGHAN. Helen has letters to write for the afternoon post, I know.

HELEN. Oh, no, mamma; I haven't any letters to write.

MRS. VAUGHAN. Yes, you have, my dear; your Aunt Harriet would be dreadfully disappointed if she didn't get a nice long letter from you to-morrow morning. Come along. [*To* JAMES *and* GERALD.] Good-bye, then, for the present.

Exeunt MRS. VAUGHAN *and* HELEN *with parasols up.*

[*Without.*] It certainly seems a pity to go indoors on such a lovely day with the garden smelling so sweet, but unfortunately one can't spend all one's day in the open, unless one's a wild animal, or a gardener, or something of that kind. . . .

[*Voice dies away.*

GERALD [*shaking* JAMES *by the hand*]. My dear chap, I know all.

JAMES. The deuce you do! All what?

GERALD. About you and Miss Vaughan.

Enter MISS LATIMER.

MISS LATIMER. Once! [*Exit* MISS LATIMER.

JAMES. Lord! She gave me quite a jump. Is she always like that? What about me and Miss Vaughan?

GERALD. You love her.

JAMES. Of course I do; she's charming, isn't she?

GERALD. I know how you were parted.

JAMES. Oh! . . . Oh, that's an old story.

GERALD. She loves you just as much as ever.

JAMES. How nice of her! That's her manner; she's always like that. What a ripping day! [*Yawning.*] I must find a quiet corner somewhere in the shade.

GERALD. But you're coming for a walk!

JAMES. A walk? Oh no. I say, old chap, you must let me off; I'm that sleepy.

GERALD. But you said you were going for a walk.

JAMES. That was just to shake off the women.

GERALD. Good heavens! to shake off the women.

Enter MISS LATIMER.

MISS LATIMER. Twice! [*Exit* MISS LATIMER.

JAMES. Heavens! There she is again. Of course I'll go if you insist, but the fact is, I always have a nap after lunch.

GERALD. A nap!

JAMES. Isn't there a hammock anywhere?

GERALD. Yes; there's one in the orchard.

JAMES. The very ticket. Which way?

GERALD. This way. You're a most mysterious man.

JAMES. Don't you worry about me. You'd better have a snooze too on a day like this.

GERALD. I never sleep in the daytime, not even in India.

JAMES. Don't you really? What a hearty chap you are! I wish I had your stamina. [*Exeunt talking.*

MRS. VAUGHAN [*without*]. You do walk so fast. Really, I can hardly keep up with you.

MISS LATIMER [*without*]. It's nearly over.

Enter MRS. VAUGHAN *and* MISS LATIMER. MRS. VAUGHAN *with gardening gloves, basket and scissors.*

Three times! They've gone. Let's sit down here again.

MRS. VAUGHAN. I was so upset, my dear, I could hardly utter a word all lunch, so I think you'll admit I really must have been very bad. How could one imagine after he had been safely swallowed by a shark, that he would turn up again in this way? It quite reminds one of Jonah and the whale. How surprised Jonah's friends must have been at his coming back when they all supposed they had seen the last of him. Nobody seems to have thought what a terrible shock it must have been for them, to say nothing of the whale. No, once people get swallowed by fish it is more satisfactory in every way if they remain so; then you know where you are.

MISS LATIMER. Where *they* are, you mean.

MRS. VAUGHAN. If only I could make Helen write letters all day; or if only she would fall ill suddenly; but one mustn't hope for that again so soon, as she's only just well. Really, dear Miss Latimer, I don't know *what* to do!

MISS LATIMER. What I can't understand is, how the mistake ever arose.

MRS. VAUGHAN. Ah, our being so certain that it was our Mr. Thompson. No, of course that *was* a mistake.

MISS LATIMER. The shipping company ought to have known. I wonder the papers didn't say.

MRS. VAUGHAN. Yes, yes. Well, the fact is that we weren't really sure that it *was* our Mr. Thompson.

MISS LATIMER. Not sure?

MRS. VAUGHAN. We didn't *want* to be sure.

MISS LATIMER. Didn't want to be?

MRS. VAUGHAN. No. Now you're shocked, dear Miss Latimer; but there really is no use in being shocked as I tell John. John is always being shocked. It was all for Helen's sake. You see, if we had made inquiries and all that, we might have found that it *wasn't* our Mr. Thompson after all, and what would have been the good of *that?* We didn't want Helen to worry about him any more; so what a good plan it was if only he was finally disposed of in some way. That was *my* idea. As soon as I saw the wreck in the *Mail*, with James Thompson's name among the missing, I took it in to John, and said, There! Well, John said this and that, and he said we ought to inquire before telling Helen; for Helen never reads the papers, and would have known nothing about it if we hadn't told her. So I said, "No, John, inquiries are unnecessary, for if it's our Mr. Thompson they'll make no difference, and if it isn't, we'd much rather not know." It took John a long time to see it; John isn't quick: but so it was settled in the end. Helen was dreadfully distressed, poor child, which was only natural; but I fully expected that she would soon get over it; for one can't go on grieving for ever, can one? Indeed, I often find it hard to go on grieving long enough; it's so much easier to look on the bright side of things; and surely, if Mr. Thompson was really dead, nobody could expect Helen to consider herself engaged to be married to him, could they? The fact is that everything would have worked very well if only this other Mr. Thompson, who now turns out to have been a perfect stranger, had managed to get drowned in a more normal and unobtrusive kind of way. At first the papers merely said he was missing, and there's nothing very romantic about that, is there? It might happen to anyone. Then came these accounts. . . . He really does seem to have behaved splendidly.

MISS LATIMER. Poor fellow !

MRS. VAUGHAN. Yes, and it was a great surprise to all of us. For Mr. Thompson had never displayed the least symptom of heroism as John's secretary ; not of course that there was much opportunity in the sort of work that he was doing for John. And it really was very unfortunate ; for Helen is so fanciful. If only he had died quietly in his bed, she wouldn't have felt it in the same way ; but when there were columns about him in the halfpenny papers, and even the *Times* had a little paragraph, she said that she could never be another's because her heart was buried with him, though of course he never was buried at all, unless you count the shark.

MISS LATIMER. I only wonder you never found out the mistake before.

MRS. VAUGHAN. Well, you see, John had made him promise not to write to Helen, as it wouldn't be the thing if they couldn't be married. And Mr. Thompson kept his word. Men are always so honourable in that sort of way, don't you think ? Besides, they're never fond of writing letters, especially if they happen to be secretaries. And it all comes round to that again, what do you advise me to do now ?

MISS LATIMER. Well, my dear, I must candidly confess that I don't think much of this Mr. Thompson of yours.

MRS. VAUGHAN. Why, to tell you the truth, neither do I.

MISS LATIMER. He seems a very flabby sort of individual to me.

MRS. VAUGHAN. Then you advise me to send him to the right-about ?

MISS LATIMER. Not at all. It isn't we that have got to marry him ; it's Helen. It doesn't matter whether *we* are in love with him—the question is, is Helen ?

MRS. VAUGHAN. Of course she is, desperately.

MISS LATIMER. Then there's no more question about it. I advise you to let them marry.

MRS. VAUGHAN. You do?

MISS LATIMER. I do.

MRS. VAUGHAN. Well, I'm delighted to hear you say so; for the fact is, my dear Miss Latimer, that that is the very thing I had made up my mind to do, and I should have felt extremely vexed if you had disapproved of my decision. And if Mr. Thompson hasn't any money . . .

MISS LATIMER. Then Mr. Vaughan will have to help them.

MRS. VAUGHAN. Exactly what I felt. Poor John! he does so dislike parting with money. All English parents do, and very likely foreign ones too for the matter of that. However, I dare say it won't be much; after all, we may find that Mr. Thompson is quite rich by now, for I must say he seemed to be wearing a very nice suit, and he's quite good-looking of a sort.

MISS LATIMER. Well, I hope they'll be happy.

MRS. VAUGHAN. I see very small prospect of that; but, of course, you never know, for girls have such odd tastes nowadays. I should certainly have preferred her marrying somebody more ordinary, like your nephew Gerald.

MISS LATIMER. I should hardly have called Gerald ordinary.

MRS. VAUGHAN. Oh no, not in that sense, of course.

MISS LATIMER. But in any case, there's no question of that now.

MRS. VAUGHAN. No, since Helen lays it down that it's got to be Mr. Thompson or no one, I see no other way out of it.

MISS LATIMER. Excuse me, please; I've come to the end of my wool; I must go in and get some more.

MRS. VAUGHAN. And if you see Helen, would you mind telling her to make haste with her letters and come out here? I want to talk to her.

[*Exit* MISS LATIMER. MRS. VAUGHAN *cuts flowers and sings.*]

Enter JAMES, *yawning.*

Good gracious! Whatever are you doing here? I thought you were miles away. I really must say that you have the most extraordinary talent I ever knew for turning up when you're least expected.

JAMES. I was just thinking of getting back to my punt.

MRS. VAUGHAN. Are you going on the river?

JAMES. Yes.

MRS. VAUGHAN. Well, in that case, the best thing that you can do is to take Helen with you.

JAMES. Take Miss Vaughan with me?

MRS. VAUGHAN. She loves going on the river.

JAMES. I should like it of all things. But are you sure you don't mind?

MRS. VAUGHAN. I shall make no objections now. In fact, I withdraw my objections to everything. I didn't approve of your engagement to her before . . .

JAMES. My engagement?

MRS. VAUGHAN. Yes, your engagement to Helen.

JAMES. My dear Mrs. Vaughan . . .

MRS. VAUGHAN. No, let me speak; I have been silent too long.

JAMES. But I . . .

MRS. VAUGHAN. I didn't approve; nor did John. Still, we can't go on forbidding things for ever; and as you and she have been faithful to each other all this time, I shall not oppose your being engaged any longer.

JAMES. Why, of course, if you insist . . .

MRS. VAUGHAN. And I do hope you will make her a good and faithful husband.

JAMES. Can you doubt it?

MRS. VAUGHAN. Of course, I don't think it an ideal marriage.

JAMES. No, no !

MRS. VAUGHAN. Nobody could. Still, if Helen has set her heart upon it . . .

JAMES. But do you really mean that Miss Vaughan . . .

MRS. VAUGHAN. She has somehow got it into her head that she can't be happy without you.

JAMES. Has she, really ? Well, upon my word, that is really ripping of her.

MRS. VAUGHAN. Now let us waste no time, but get at once to the business side of the question ; for John will expect me to be able to tell him what settlements you propose to make on his daughter.

JAMES. Oh, settlements !

MRS. VAUGHAN. You have some property to live on, I suppose ?

JAMES. Well, not very much I'm afraid just at present.

MRS. VAUGHAN. But this gold-mine . . .

JAMES. Why, to be candid, there's some doubt about the gold-mine.

MRS. VAUGHAN. What sort of doubt ?

JAMES. First, as to whether there's any gold in it ; and secondly, as to whether it's really ours. But I dare say it will turn out all right. Who knows ? I may be a millionaire in time.

MRS. VAUGHAN. And failing that ?

JAMES. Nothing.

MRS. VAUGHAN. No expectations ? No wealthy uncle who is going to make you his heir ?

JAMES. They've rather gone out, those uncles.

MRS. VAUGHAN. Like the buffaloes. . . . Well, this is certainly rather discouraging. As the child's mother I am bound to consider what you're going to live on, *who* you're going to live on . . .

JAMES. Oh, I expect it'll be all right. Why worry ? People always say one's going to starve, but one never does. But what will Mr. Vaughan say to the business ?

MRS. VAUGHAN. Oh! John will certainly disapprove; but then he always disapproves of everything, so we shall have to put up with that as best we can. No, let us regard the thing as settled.

JAMES. It's very kind of you. I can't tell you how flattered I am. I had no notion, when I turned in here for lunch, that I should find myself engaged to be married by tea-time.

MRS. VAUGHAN. It certainly is a most romantic story; most romantic. . . . And here comes Helen. Talk of the Angels . . .

Enter HELEN.

Helen, my child, I have changed my mind, and now withdraw all my objections to your engagement.

HELEN. Engagement, Mamma?

MRS. VAUGHAN. To Mr. Thompson; or rather James, as I suppose I ought to call him now.

HELEN. But, Mamma!

MRS. VAUGHAN. I have made up my mind not to stand in the way of your happiness any longer.

HELEN. Oh, Mamma!

MRS. VAUGHAN. I should much have preferred your marrying some one else, but it's no use crying over spilt milk; so give me a kiss, my dear; and I will go in and write all about it to your father. He will think it most unwise; but it seems to be the best that we can make of a bad job; and I can only trust that you will not live to regret what I am bound to regard as a very rash undertaking.

[*Exit* MRS. VAUGHAN.

JAMES. Well, so it seems we're engaged to be married.

HELEN. So it seems. Don't you like it?

JAMES. Don't I like it! You delicious person. . . . Everything conspires together, a perfect day, a perfect place, the smell of roses, and then . . . Helen, you don't know how happy I feel!

HELEN. Do you really?

JAMES. After two years of separation, two years without you.

HELEN. And have you missed me all the time?

JAMES. Every moment, pretty nearly every moment.

HELEN. Are you sure? Have you never been in love with anybody else all that time?

JAMES. Now come, don't let's ask each other silly questions. Let's enjoy ourselves. Shall I come and be Mr. Vaughan's secretary again?

HELEN. Oh! Papa wouldn't have you. He's got a lady-secretary now—he says he prefers it.

JAMES. I don't wonder . . . Helen, you've got the most agitating hair I ever saw, and your hands simply make one giddy. Do you remember how I kissed them once? How could I dare!

HELEN. Of course I remember.

JAMES. And is it true that you've often thought of me since then?

HELEN [*laughing*]. Now and then!

[*A roaring without.*

Oh, James! what's that?

JAMES. Nothing, some motorist. But tell me . . .

HELEN. It sounded like a wild beast roaring.

JAMES. That's what I say—a motorist. But I want to know something more . . . [*A gun goes off.*

HELEN. Oh, James! what's that?

JAMES. They've punctured.

HELEN. I'm rather frightened.

JAMES. Don't be frightened! you look so lovely when you're frightened. It isn't fair! [*Kissing her.*] Don't be angry—it was your fault.

HELEN. Oh, James!

JAMES. Can you forgive me?

HELEN. What shall we do now?

JAMES. Let's go off in the punt.

HELEN. Somewhere right away—what fun !

JAMES. I *am* glad I didn't go for that walk !

HELEN. What became of Captain Latimer ?

JAMES. He had to go without me. [HELEN *laughs.* What's the matter ?

HELEN. I can't help laughing when I think of him stumping along the road there all alone.

JAMES. While we . . . Do you know, Helen, I don't believe there were ever two people so absolutely made for one another. . . .

VOICES [*without*]. Open the gate. This way. You'll be all right in a minute.

JAMES. Hullo, what the devil's this ?

Enter GERALD *and two* COUNTRYMEN, *supporting* FROHOCK.

Why, here's Latimer back again.

HELEN. Oh, and a stranger with him.

JAMES. A handsome stranger.

HELEN. He's all wet. What can have happened ?

JAMES. What's up ? Who is this ?

GERALD. It's a lion tamer.

JAMES. A lion tamer ?

GERALD. From the Circus.

PARLOURMAIDS *run in.*

HELEN. Oh, and is he killed ?

FROHOCK. No, I'm not killed ; I'm only frightened. Give me some brandy, there's a good fellow ; I'll be better soon.

HELEN. Get some brandy, Mary, quick !

[*Exit* MARY.]

FROHOCK. Let me lie down.

HELEN. Oh, what has happened ? What can we do ?

GERALD. A lion has escaped from the menagerie at the Circus.

HELEN. A lion ? That's what we heard roaring.

JAMES. The motor-car.

HELEN. Oh, what shall we do? We shall all be eaten!

GERALD. There is no danger. I have killed the lion.

HELEN. Killed it? You have killed a lion?

GERALD. I shot him with a gun.

JAMES. The puncture.

GERALD. The Territorials were passing; I borrowed a gun.

HELEN. Oh, James, do you hear that? Captain Latimer has killed a lion.

Enter MRS. VAUGHAN *and* MISS LATIMER.

MRS. VAUGHAN. It really is extraordinary; every time that Captain Latimer goes for a walk he brings home some one more interesting than the last.

MISS LATIMER. Why, Gerald, whatever have you been doing now?

GERALD. Oh, nothing; I just happened to meet this gentleman . . .

JAMES. That's all; the most ordinary thing in the world. He just happened to meet a gentleman running down the road with a lion at his heels; quite a common spectacle about Maidenhead.

MISS LATIMER. A lion! Good heavens! A live lion?

GERALD. Yes, it was alive, Aunt Harriet. But this gentleman wasn't on the road; he was in the middle of the river.

MISS LATIMER. And the lion . . .

GERALD. Was on the bank just going to jump at him.

MISS LATIMER. But, good gracious, what was the man doing in the middle of the river?

FROHOCK. Preparing to bob, madam, when he jumped.

HELEN. Just fancy! Captain Latimer *killed* the lion.

MRS. VAUGHAN. Killed the lion?

HELEN. He took a gun and shot him.

FROHOCK. Are you sure the beastly thing is dead?

GERALD. Dead as a door-nail; I shot him right through the heart.

HELEN. Oh, it's too wonderful, too delightful! One can hardly believe it's true.

MISS LATIMER. But what was the lion after this gentleman for? Didn't he like him?

FROHOCK. Couldn't stand me, madam; singled me out at once and made a bee-line for me, as soon as he got out of his cage.

MRS. VAUGHAN. It's too thrilling for words; and anything more providential than the lion getting out and preparing to jump on this gentleman just as Gerald came by cannot be well imagined.

MISS LATIMER. There's an old-fashioned man for you, Mr. Thompson.

HELEN. I'm proud to have you for a friend.

MISS LATIMER. And now, my dear Gerald, I think that the best thing you can do is to take our visitor indoors and give him a hot bath.

GERALD. Well, perhaps I had.

MISS LATIMER [*to the two* COUNTRYMEN]. And I'm very much obliged to you for escorting my nephew home, and I hope you'll go at once to the nearest public-house, and drink his health in a pot of good wholesome ale [*giving them money*].

COUNTRYMEN. Thank you, ma'am.

[*Exeunt* COUNTRYMEN.

MRS. VAUGHAN. And I think, if you don't mind, I'll ask you to go in by the back-door, which I'm sure is very irregular for a hero, but one can't be too careful with other people's carpets, though if I had my own way it should be under a triumphal arch of roses with *Væ Victis* on the top, and Helen scattering flowers on the path before you as you walk.

[*During this speech exeunt* MRS. VAUGHAN, MISS LATI-

MER, FROHOCK, *and* GERALD. HELEN *stands gazing after them.*]

JAMES. Well, shall we make a start now? . . . Helen!

HELEN [*waking from her abstraction*]. Yes? . . . Oh, isn't it wonderful!

JAMES. I say, shall we start now?

HELEN. Start? Where for?

JAMES. The river. We were going out in a punt if you remember.

HELEN. Of course!

JAMES. But it's just as you like. If you'd rather not go . . .

HELEN. Not go? After all these years? Oh, James, how could you think it! We'll sail together away, away into fairyland.

JAMES. Rustling through the water-lilies, through the cool smell of the water; and I'll lie gazing up into your wonderful eyes . . .

HELEN. Oh, but you'll be busy punting.

JAMES. Punting? Catch me, on a day like this!

HELEN. But how are we to get along?

JAMES. We'll drift, we'll drift, little friend; that's the best way to get about.

HELEN. Oh, James! Fancy! A lion!

CURTAIN.

ACT III

The same scene as Act I. A week later. HELEN *at the piano;* MISS LATIMER *knitting.* JAMES *smoking a cigarette at his ease on a sofa, half-hidden.*

HELEN [*singing*].

O blow ye winds of winter, blow,
And cover me with spotless snow;
And tear the branches from the tree
And strew the dead leaves over me.

MISS LATIMER. That seems a very doleful sort of song.

HELEN. Yes, it is sad.

MISS LATIMER. It's the sort I used to hear my old Aunt Maria singing when I was a little girl.

HELEN. They're coming in again.

MISS LATIMER. Humph!

JAMES. Don't stop, I'm enjoying myself.

HELEN [*singing*].

For ah! my spring of life is flown,
And I must live alone, alone;
Never again the sun shall shine
Upon this broken heart of mine.

Enter MRS. VAUGHAN *with big rolls of wall-paper; she joins in the last words of the song.*

MRS. VAUGHAN. Bravo, bravo both of us! What a charming song it is!

JAMES. Jolly.

MRS. VAUGHAN. But I must interrupt you now for something very important; for the patterns have come for the drawing-room wall-paper, and the great question

arises : are we to have it pink to match the carpet, or blue to match the curtains ? For if we have it pink to match the carpet it is sure to swear with the curtains, and if we have it blue to match the curtains it is sure to swear with the carpet. So which shall it be ?

JAMES. Under the circumstances, Mrs. Vaughan, everything seems to point to white.

MRS. VAUGHAN. But that will never do, because we've had the dado distempered a pale coffee cream.

JAMES. Then I give it up ; I leave it to you ; I have absolute confidence in your judgment.

MRS. VAUGHAN. What am I to do with him, Miss Latimer ? He's always like this.

JAMES. After all, what do wall-papers matter ? I shall be too busy looking at Helen to notice them.

MRS. VAUGHAN. These two young people leave absolutely everything to me. You'd think it was I and not they who was going to be married. Upon my word, I doubt if they'd get married at all if it wasn't for me. I've had to take the house, furnish it, paper it, paint it and everything. The result is, of course, that I am absolutely worn out, a perfect wreck ; what I should do without my Magnetophosphoro I cannot conceive.

Enter a PARLOURMAID *with letters.*

Dr. Wapshot says . . . What's that, Mary ?

MARY. It's the post, mum.

MRS. VAUGHAN. Mary, bring me my Magnetophosphoro at once.

JAMES. And, Mary, has the new paper come ?

MARY. Not yet, sir. [*Exit* MARY.

[MISS LATIMER *drops a number of blue press-cuttings on the floor.*]

HELEN. Oh, Miss Latimer, they're press-cuttings ! Oh, I can guess the subject ! About your nephew . . .

JAMES. Latimer and the lion !

HELEN. Oh, Miss Latimer, have you subscribed to an agency for that?

MISS LATIMER. Well, my dear, you subscribed to an agency for cuttings about Mr. Thompson and the sharks.

Enter MARY *with koumiss and Magnetophosphoro.*

JAMES [*picking up a slip*]. "The King of Beasts at bay in Berks."

MISS LATIMER. Give that back to me at once, sir!

[*She takes it from him.*

JAMES [*jumping on a chair and reading another slip*]. "Although adventures with lions do not strictly come within the purview of a paper devoted to poultry farming . . ." From the *Hen Fanciers' Gazette.*

MISS LATIMER. How dare you, sir! Come down at once, or I'll pull you down!

HELEN. Come down, James, come down! [*To* MISS LATIMER.] You must let me paste them all in a book.

[*Exit* MISS LATIMER.]

There, now you've made her angry! How can you be so stupid, James?

MRS. VAUGHAN [*mixing medicine*]. Two teaspoons three times a day mixed to an even paste in 6 or 8 spoonfuls of sterilised koumiss; and then I must lie down and rest for half an hour. Otherwise Dr. Wapshot says he cannot answer for my life.

MARY. If you please, mum, Miss Florence has just arrived.

MRS. VAUGHAN. The dressmaker? It's my new frock! Where is she, Mary?

MARY. She's upstairs in your room, mum.

MRS. VAUGHAN. I'll come at once.

HELEN. And what about your Magnetophosphoro?

MRS. VAUGHAN. Oh, you must drink it yourself. I can't stop for that. [*Going.*] Now at last I shall be able

to wear something decent again, instead of going about looking a perfect show, as if I had come down to the country to wear out somebody else's old clothes. [*Exit talking.*

HELEN. Well, James?

JAMES. Well, my pet?

HELEN. You haven't . . . you haven't said good morning properly yet.

JAMES. I was waiting for the opportunity. [*Kissing her.*] Now this is my idea of absolute bliss; to be down in the depths of the country, far, far away from all the turmoil of life and politics and business. I wonder why the newspaper's so late to-day.

HELEN. What do we want with newspapers?

JAMES. What indeed, my lovely one? How nice and cool your hands are. I like cool hands. [*Kissing them.*] What a jolly ring that is. Was it a present?

HELEN. Yes.

JAMES. Who gave it you?

HELEN. You did; at least I like to think you did. When I thought you were drowned I bought it so as to feel as if we were really engaged.

JAMES. A damned uncomfortable moist attachment, eh?

HELEN. Oh, James, think of all those poor women!

JAMES. Oh, damn those poor women! I didn't save them, I tell you. I am sick of that Thompson who wasn't me, the wrong Thompson, the usurping Perkin Warbeck Thompson. I shall never get the rascal out of your head.

HELEN. I wonder what he was like, poor fellow.

JAMES. Cast in an heroic mould, no doubt; something on Latimer's lines, I shouldn't wonder.

HELEN. Yes, but I always picture him as rather smaller.

JAMES. Dear Helen!

HELEN. Dear James!

JAMES. That's right. Shut your eyes. It helps the illusion.

HELEN. What illusion?

JAMES. That I'm the other Thompson, the one who was like Latimer, only rather smaller.

HELEN. James, I believe you're jealous !

JAMES. Me ? Never ! I've read of people being jealous in novels, but I've never . . .

HELEN [*angry*]. Then I don't believe you've ever really been in love !

JAMES [*piqued*]. Me never in love ? Why, I never knew such a man as I am ; I'm always falling in love.

HELEN [*jealous*]. So that's the sort of man you are !

JAMES. Deeper and deeper in love, I mean, with you.

HELEN. Oh, is that true, James ?

JAMES. Can't you see it for yourself ?

HELEN. You're so nice and kind to me. Dear James ! I do love you so ; but somehow I wish you were more . . . more . . .

JAMES. More what, my pet ?

HELEN. More English, more mediæval . . . I can't express it exactly ; but I do so want you to live more up to my ideal. Surely that's what women are for ?

JAMES. Of course, to give ribbons for their knights to wear in the tourney ; to be an inspiration and a battle-cry : " Helen for ever, to Hell with the rest ! "

HELEN. Please don't laugh at everything, James. How splendid they were, those old knights, going about ridding the world of monsters.

JAMES. Like Latimer and the lion, eh ?

HELEN. I think the less said about that the better. Captain Latimer was saving lives, while you were lying asleep in the hammock.

JAMES. Well, well, it takes all sorts to make a world. It wouldn't do if we were all heroes. You must have cowards, too ; otherwise when there's a fight who's to run away ?

HELEN [*impatiently*]. Of course, of course.

JAMES. Besides, after all, who knows if heroes really

do any good? We don't really know if Frohock was in any actual danger.

HELEN. What, right in the water, with the lion lashing his flanks on the bank?

JAMES. Oh, lashing his flanks! He may have been only wagging his tail . . . rather pleased at finding Frohock, and only waiting for him to get out and lead him back to his cage, when up comes the gallant Captain with a gun . . .

HELEN. You know you're talking nonsense.

JAMES. And any way, the loss of a valuable lion was a serious thing for the poor circus proprietors, who have brought an action against Latimer for £500. . . .

HELEN. It's an abominable shame!

JAMES. Which they'll win, mind you. He'll have to stump up.

HELEN. And I suppose you approve?

JAMES. Whereas if Frohock had been killed, his mother wouldn't have got more than £300 at the most under the Employers' Liability Act.

[HELEN *takes loose pink cuttings from an album and shakes them into the waste-paper basket.*]

What are you up to?

HELEN. I'm throwing away the second volume of the cuttings about you and your wretched little shipwreck. I fortunately hadn't stuck them in yet.

[*She gets* MISS LATIMER'S *blue cuttings and a paste-pot.*

JAMES. You spiteful little creature! Just because I tell you the unromantic truths of real life . . .

HELEN. I never thought much of those shipwreck adventures anyhow; anybody can jump into the water.

JAMES. But think of the sharks! Next to the bite of the anopheles mosquito they say that a shark's is the most dangerous. . . .

HELEN. Besides, after all, you weren't there at all; whereas Captain Latimer certainly was.

JAMES. Well, that does make a difference, I must allow.

HELEN. Oh, I wish I had your sang-froid! If I said I wanted to break off our engagement, I believe you'd only laugh.

JAMES. Ah, don't be angry with me, my little Helen. I was only teasing.

HELEN [*falling into his arms*]. Oh, forgive me, forgive me, James!

JAMES. There, there!

HELEN. I seem to be mad at times. I can't see you as you really are. All the nobility that is hidden away in you . . .

JAMES. It's so well hidden.

HELEN. I saw it all so clearly when I thought you were drowned. . . .

JAMES. Eaten, my pet.

HELEN [*angry*]. Drowned, I say! I prefer drowned. Am I never to have my own way?

JAMES. There, there! Have it as you like.

HELEN. You're always trying to annoy me. No, no! Don't go away! Darling, darling James, I've got a secret I want to tell you—a great secret.

JAMES. And what's the great secret, my own?

HELEN. We're to be married much sooner than we thought.

JAMES. To be married?

HELEN. Papa consents. [*Showing him a letter.*

JAMES. Dear Papa! [*Reading the letter and smiling.*

HELEN. And Mamma says, the sooner we get it over the better.

JAMES. Have it out like men, eh? And when's it to be? Come, let me know the worst.

HELEN. In a fortnight.

JAMES. In a fortnight? From when?

HELEN. From now.

JAMES. Good Lord! But you can't do it! Why, dammy, the banns alone take three weeks.

HELEN. There won't be any banns. Mamma's sent up to London and got a special licence.

JAMES. That woman thinks of everything! Oh, why the devil can people never let well alone? Change, change, change! As soon as you get into one happy state everybody bands together to hustle you out into another.

HELEN. What do you mean, James? Are you dissatisfied?

JAMES. Me? No, indeed! I'm the only contented man I know. All I ask is for things to go on for ever as they are.

HELEN. But they can't.

JAMES. Here were we, as happy as two birds. I was engaged! Engaged to be married to Helen Vaughan . . . What poetry! What bliss! I only ask to be engaged to Helen Vaughan all my life. But no, they're not satisfied; they all begin worrying at once, getting a house, talking of drains . . . Drains! Choosing chintzes and wall-papers . . .

HELEN. I don't believe you really want to be married!

JAMES. Then, think of the wedding! Think of the bridegroom in a new frock coat and an idiotic smile. . . . Oh, Thompson, Thompson! The great, wonderful Thompson of the *Gothenburg*, I mean, not this pitiful reality here; I defy even you to look a hero at your own wedding!

HELEN. We needn't drag him in, James.

Enter MARY *with the "Daily Mail."*

MARY. Oh, I beg pardon, sir.

JAMES. Come in, come in! Everybody apologises. Is that the paper? [*Exit* MARY.]

A fortnight, dammy, only a fortnight to enjoy this quiet haven, far from the tumult. . . . Hullo, Somerset had to follow on; Kennedy got 6 wickets for 35 . . .

HELEN. If you want to read the newspaper you'd better go into the garden.

JAMES. You're not angry with me? Now, come, Helen . .

HELEN. Ah! Don't touch me!

JAMES. Why, what's the matter?

HELEN. I hate you! I hate you! [*Throwing herself into his arms.*] Oh, James, James! It's all so different from what I expected!

JAMES. What is?

HELEN. It is; you are; everything is. Oh, go away! Don't you see I want to be alone?

JAMES. I can't bear to leave you like this; but if you really mean it . . .

HELEN. No, no! Don't go! I can't bear to be left by myself.

JAMES. Well, what the devil *am* I to do, then?

Enter GERALD *with golf-clubs.*

GERALD. Oh, I'm sorry, I'm afraid I'm interrupting you.

JAMES. Not a bit. Don't apologise. We were just having a chat; laughing and joking together, eh?

GERALD. I was only passing through.

JAMES. You're looking rather gloomy, old chap.

GERALD. I've been topping everything this morning.

JAMES. Ah, you must get down to them, you must get down to them! Here's a letter for you. I was just going to have a look at the newspaper in the garden.

[*He goes out at the window.* HELEN *goes to the piano and sings again softly.* GERALD *reads his letter.*]

GERALD. As I hoped! My application is granted: it is my recall to India.

HELEN [*singing*].

For ah! my spring of life is flown,
And I must live alone, alone . .

[*She cries.*

GERALD. Miss Vaughan in tears! This is too much. Tell me what I can do for you.

HELEN. Nothing; go away!

GERALD. In two days I shall be gone from here; but if a lifetime of devotion . . . Oh, Miss Vaughan, since this is our last farewell, may I, just once in all my life . . .

[*He kisses her hand.*

Enter MISS LATIMER, *dressed in black.*

MISS LATIMER. Well, Gerald?

GERALD. Aunt Harriet, I think I ought to explain . . .

MISS LATIMER. It certainly seems to need an explanation.

GERALD. I trust you don't imagine . . .

MISS LATIMER. I imagine nothing.

GERALD. I was only . . . Why, you've gone and changed your dress.

MISS LATIMER. Run along, and don't talk gammon to me!

[*Exit* GERALD.]

HELEN. Don't be angry with me, Miss Latimer.

MISS LATIMER. I'm not in the least angry with you, my dear. But oh, how I should like to know what is going on in that funny little head of yours!

HELEN. I don't think I know myself.

MISS LATIMER. What are you crying for?

HELEN. I don't know.

MISS LATIMER. There, there; now sit down like a good girl and tell me: Are you very much in love with Mr. Thompson?

HELEN. Yes, of course I am.

MISS LATIMER. When did you first fall in love with him?

HELEN. Years and years ago, when I was quite a little girl.

MISS LATIMER. Quite a little girl? But you've only known him three years.

HELEN. Yes, but I was in love with him before.

MISS LATIMER. Before you knew him?

HELEN. I used to imagine the man I was going to be in love with; I wrote all about him in my diary.

MISS LATIMER. Oh!

HELEN. Then, when I met James I knew at once that it was him.

MISS LATIMER. I see; he was just like him, was he?

HELEN. Yes; at least, not exactly like, of course.

MISS LATIMER. No, one couldn't expect that. And when were you most in love with him, before you met him or after?

HELEN. Oh, Miss Latimer, of course it was after.

MISS LATIMER. And most of all when you thought he was drowned?

HELEN. Yes, that was when he seemed most like the man in my diary. . . . I sat up last night reading it.

MISS LATIMER. Reading what?

HELEN. My diary.

MISS LATIMER. So that accounts for it!

HELEN. How do you mean?

MISS LATIMER. This Mr. Thompson didn't quite carry out . . . Oh, you stupid little idiot! Here you are going to be married in a fortnight and you detest the man you're going to marry!

HELEN. No, no! I adore him!

MISS LATIMER. You positively detest him.

HELEN. No, at the bottom of my heart I love him just the same as ever.

MISS LATIMER. He's not the same man as the man you've been in love with at all; that was a man you made up for yourself, combined with another who was drowned! Oh dear, oh dear! what's the good of being in love with people who are dead, or people who aren't born yet? That's

morbid—that's ridiculous. One ought to be in love with people who are alive—nice healthy people that one can marry and be comfortable with.

HELEN. Don't scold me.

MISS LATIMER. No, no. I've been through it all myself. I kept a diary once.

HELEN. Oh, was there a man in your diary too?

MISS LATIMER. A man, my dear? There were hundreds of them. I was a perfect Mormon . . . in my diary. Now, I'll tell you what I'm going to do; I'm going to get this wedding put off for a little while, till we've had time to think it over properly.

HELEN. Can weddings be put off?

MISS LATIMER. Weddings by special licence can.

HELEN. Oh, if one could! Just to give me time to get back into my right mind again.

MISS LATIMER. The only thing is, how to set about it.

[MRS. VAUGHAN *laughs without.*]

There's your mother. I'll talk to her about it.

HELEN. Oh, Miss Latimer!

MISS LATIMER. Now, give me a good hug and run up to your room.

HELEN. Oh, if only I were going to be an old maid like you!

MISS LATIMER. So you shall, my dear. You're just cut out to be an old maid. We'll sit side by side and knit stockings together.

[*Exit* HELEN *by one door; enter* MRS. VAUGHAN *by another, in a new gown and toque, looking her best.*]

MRS. VAUGHAN. There! What do you think of that?

[*She turns about, exhibiting her frock, talking about it volubly, and looking into a glass. At last she notices* MISS LATIMER'S *clothes.*]

But *you've* got on a new frock, too ! Dear, dear, a mourning frock ! It's wonderful how becoming mourning is to some complexions. I often wish I were in mourning for somebody. And I think I like your waist up there ; they have been getting lower now for years, until one sometimes wonders where they will stop. And if one may ask, dear Miss Latimer, who is it that you are in mourning for ?

MISS LATIMER. For my brother-in-law, Jack Everard.

MRS. VAUGHAN. Oh dear, I'm sorry it's for such a near relation.

MISS LATIMER. Ah, well, of course there are compensations for all our misfortunes. He was a cantankerous old fellow and quarrelled with all his relatives. It was quite a surprise when we heard he had left all his money to Gerald.

MRS. VAUGHAN. Left all his money to Gerald ? Why, when was this ?

MISS LATIMER. About a week ago.

MRS. VAUGHAN. But I never heard a word about it. Why all this mystery ?

MISS LATIMER. That was Gerald's doing. He was modest about it.

MRS. VAUGHAN. Modest about his uncle dying ?

MISS LATIMER. No, about the money.

MRS. VAUGHAN. And how much did it amount to ?

MISS LATIMER. About £1,500 a year.

MRS. VAUGHAN. £1,500 a year !

MISS LATIMER. And a house in Devonshire.

MRS. VAUGHAN. But, my dear Miss Latimer, it's quite a fortune.

MISS LATIMER. Yes, he has become quite a *parti*, hasn't he ? However, I've something far more important to talk of now. Matilda, this wedding can't possibly come off.

MRS. VAUGHAN. What wedding ?

MISS LATIMER. Helen's wedding.

MRS. VAUGHAN. Whatever do you mean? Helen's wedding not come off?

MISS LATIMER. By hook or by crook, it's got to be stopped.

MRS. VAUGHAN. And why, pray?

MISS LATIMER. Because it would be a sin; because your daughter is not in love with Mr. Thompson.

MRS. VAUGHAN. Not in love with Mr. Thompson?

MISS LATIMER. How could she be? How could anyone be?

MRS. VAUGHAN. Why, he's one of the most charming . . .

MISS LATIMER. He's only a half-man; he has no soul.

MRS. VAUGHAN. Hasn't he? Why really, I've known him for a long time now, and I've never noticed anything of that kind.

MISS LATIMER. And as for Helen, she's not only not in love with him, but without knowing it, she's in love with some one else.

MRS. VAUGHAN. Oh no! Oh dear no!

MISS LATIMER. It's a fact.

MRS. VAUGHAN. Who do you mean then?

MISS LATIMER. Gerald.

MRS. VAUGHAN. Captain Latimer? Why, whatever makes you think that?

MISS LATIMER. Only ten minutes ago, when I came in here there he was kissing her hand.

MRS. VAUGHAN. Kissing her hand? Oh dear no! There must be some mistake.

MISS LATIMER. Not on my part. Of course *he* may have mistaken her for some one else, or *she* may have mistaken him for Mr. Thompson. But there didn't seem to be any mistake about it.

MRS. VAUGHAN. But then . . . then in that case. . . . Surely it seems as if *he* must be in love with *her?*

MISS LATIMER. It does seem like it, doesn't it? The more so as he proposed to her a week ago.

MRS. VAUGHAN. He proposed to her? But she never told me a word.

MISS LATIMER. A girl's mother is the last person in the world that she's likely to confide in nowadays.

MRS. VAUGHAN. But if she's in love with him, whatever made her refuse him?

MISS LATIMER. She refused him because she thought she was in love with Mr. Thompson. But a week of his company has been enough to dispel *that* illusion; and now at last, at the bottom of her heart, I believe she knows that Gerald is the right man.

MRS. VAUGHAN. Then why don't they do something?

MISS LATIMER. Because Helen's a goose and Gerald's a hero out of an old-fashioned melodrama, always ready to sacrifice himself and everybody else if there's a sufficiently bad reason. It comes of all those sixpenny novels people read in India. The white ants eat all the more expensive books, so they can read nothing but trash. No, we must help them . . .

MRS. VAUGHAN. How delightful it would be. . . . Gerald is such a dear boy; and fifteen . . . But what about James?

MISS LATIMER. Give him the sack.

MRS. VAUGHAN. Oh dear, oh dear, why is everything so complicated nowadays? If only duelling were still in fashion. . . .

MISS LATIMER. My dear Matilda!

MRS. VAUGHAN. Think how it would simplify matters if dear Gerald were to kill James, or even if James were to kill dear Gerald. Oh dear, oh dear! And will he leave the army now?

MISS LATIMER. Not yet. He's going back to India for a time.

MRS. VAUGHAN. To India; fancy! How Helen

would adore India! She is so romantic. If places are only distant and disagreeable enough, she wants to go to them at once. The snakes and scorpions would be a positive delight to her.

MISS LATIMER. But, my dear Matilda, we are being a little "previous." We've got to stop this marriage with Mr. Thompson first.

MRS. VAUGHAN. Perhaps I had better speak to him about it.

MISS LATIMER. I fancy that's the usual thing.

MRS. VAUGHAN. But what am I to say?

MISS LATIMER. Tell him the truth.

MRS. VAUGHAN. No, no; I never like to tell the truth if I can avoid it. I shall tell him that John refuses. He doesn't, of course; he's delighted; but that is evidently the most tactful course! James, I will say . . .

MISS LATIMER. There he is coming up the path.

MRS. VAUGHAN. Oh, heavens! You must help me, Miss Latimer.

MISS LATIMER. No, thank you, I'm going to write letters in the morning-room.

MRS. VAUGHAN. Oh dear, oh dear, I foresee the most dreadful scene. His despair will be something terrible to witness. [*Exit* MISS LATIMER.

Enter JAMES, *with newspaper, from the garden.*

JAMES. Hullo, where's Helen?

MRS. VAUGHAN. Come here, James; I wish to speak to you.

JAMES. Dear me, what a solemn exordium! That's a lovely new frock of yours.

MRS. VAUGHAN. I am going to be very truthful with you.

JAMES. How dreadful it sounds.

MRS. VAUGHAN. Prepare yourself for a serious blow.

JAMES. Let fly!

MRS. VAUGHAN. The fact is that I have heard from my husband this morning.

JAMES. Aha!

MRS. VAUGHAN. And he refuses his consent to your marriage with Helen.

JAMES. Oh?

MRS. VAUGHAN. Positively refuses it in spite of all that I can say to the contrary. He is very firm. You know my husband. I am very sorry of course; but I cannot fly in my husband's face. I'm afraid you'll be very angry. You'll think it very unreasonable of him . . .

JAMES. Unreasonable? Not at all.

MRS. VAUGHAN. You don't think so? You're not angry with him?

JAMES. Why should I be? It's just what I should do myself in his place. I seem to be about as ineligible a son-in-law as you could easily have found him.

MRS. VAUGHAN. Well, really, it is very kind of you to say so.

JAMES. I've no money and no prospects. I'm not even a hero. It was the other Thompson who was the hero, and perhaps he had money too; in which case it's a pity he was drowned.

MRS. VAUGHAN. Well, really, you take it so nicely that you encourage me to be a little more candid.

JAMES. Yes, do! You see Helen showed me Mr. Vaughan's letter, consenting enthusiastically. Now what is it really?

MRS. VAUGHAN. Well, really, James, since you drive me to it; it isn't John; it's Helen herself.

JAMES. She disapproves?

MRS. VAUGHAN. I have discovered, to my great chagrin, that Helen is no longer in love with you.

JAMES. She's not?

MRS. VAUGHAN. Unfortunately, no.

JAMES. There you are! I was afraid it wouldn't last. How jolly it was for the time! So she doesn't want to marry me after all?

MRS. VAUGHAN. That's just about what it comes to.

JAMES. When did she tell you?

MRS. VAUGHAN. It wasn't me; it was Miss Latimer she told.

JAMES. Oh, Miss Latimer's in it?

MRS. VAUGHAN. Yes.

JAMES. Then that settles it. If Miss Latimer's against me, it's all over. I pass.

MRS. VAUGHAN. Now let us have no scene, I beg.

JAMES. What do you take me for?

MRS. VAUGHAN. It certainly seems an ill-chosen moment to tell a man a fortnight before his wedding that his bride wants to break it off.

JAMES. It's the very best moment if it hasn't been done before. Poor little Helen!

MRS. VAUGHAN. I know how you must feel.

JAMES. Oh, me? Oh, as for me, to tell you the truth, in a way it's a kind of relief to me.

MRS. VAUGHAN. A kind of relief! What do you mean?

JAMES. Ever since I arrived here a week ago I've felt that I was in a false position.

MRS. VAUGHAN. Why, what has happened?

JAMES. I wondered if I oughtn't to say something.

MRS. VAUGHAN. Come, James, be more explicit.

JAMES. Well, you see, when you, so to speak, betrothed Helen and myself; for I think you'll admit that we didn't have much hand in it ourselves . . .

MRS. VAUGHAN. Go on, go on!

JAMES. The fact is that I was already . . .

MRS. VAUGHAN. Yes, yes!

JAMES. I was already engaged to be married to somebody else.

MRS. VAUGHAN. Engaged to be married to somebody else?

JAMES. Yes, a girl I met in America; a Miss Fish, Millicent Fish, one of the Kentucky Fishes. There were two Fishes went over in the *Mayflower* and settled in Virginia . . .

MRS. VAUGHAN. Engaged to a Miss Fish!

JAMES. Such a nice girl! Not so artistic as Helen, but with that charming freshness that they have in the Southern States.

MRS. VAUGHAN. But do you dare to sit there and tell me that all the time you have been philandering here with Helen you have been engaged to a girl in America?

JAMES. A Miss Fish—Millicent Fish—one of the Kentucky Fishes. There were two Fishes who . . .

MRS. VAUGHAN. But, how dare you? Why didn't you tell us at once that you were engaged already?

JAMES. Well! really, Mrs. Vaughan, you gave me no time. I came in to lunch at half-past one, if you remember, and by four o'clock the whole thing was over.

MRS. VAUGHAN. Helen had a right to know.

JAMES. So had Millicent. But it wasn't very easy to tell either of them under the circumstances.

MRS. VAUGHAN. I naturally imagined you were still in love with her.

JAMES. So I was! So I am! I adore her! If I hadn't been engaged to Millicent there's nothing I should have liked better than to be engaged to Helen. It was the combination of the two that made it so awkward.

MRS. VAUGHAN. And what did you mean to do in the end?

JAMES. Oh, I hadn't any plans. Anything short of bigamy. I hoped to keep out of that.

MRS. VAUGHAN. It is too terrible that I should have been deceived like this! I like a man to be faithful! Why weren't you faithful to Helen?

JAMES. But you told me to go away and forget her. You remember? Those were your very words. Well, I went away and though I didn't actually forget her, I consoled myself with some one else. Wasn't that what you meant?

MRS. VAUGHAN. You heartless wretch! Are you ready to be engaged to every girl that comes along?

JAMES. Oh, no! How can you think it of me? She must have the right coloured eyes.

MRS. VAUGHAN. And what are the right coloured eyes, pray?

JAMES. Well, it's a kind of chestnut with complications. Whenever I meet that, I'm done for. Unfortunately, it's not an uncommon shade.

MRS. VAUGHAN. You had better hurry back to America at once. Young men like you ought to live in Utah.

JAMES. Now, really, Mrs. Vaughan, you mustn't be hard on me. The fact is, I seem to have behaved very well in extremely trying circumstances. If anyone is to blame, it's you.

MRS. VAUGHAN. Me! indeed!

JAMES. If it hadn't been for you, none of this trouble would have arisen at all. Under pretence of being a little airy, flibberty-gibberty coquette, you are the most designing, meddling, managing busybody that ever went about poking their pretty finger into other people's pies. Who was it said I had been shipwrecked? Who was it said I had saved people's lives? Who was it threw us into each other's arms a week ago? Who was it made up that ridiculous scene two years ago, when she and I were made solemnly to abjure an engagement which we neither of us had the slightest idea we had ever entered on?

MRS. VAUGHAN. But I saw you myself.

JAMES. Oh, the slightest flirtation. Upon my word, is no one safe? I shall warn Latimer.

MRS. VAUGHAN. No! no!

JAMES. It anyone comes into a room and finds him kissing Helen's hand . . .

MRS. VAUGHAN. They have! He was!

JAMES. Well, marry them then.

MRS. VAUGHAN. I will. It's as good as settled!

JAMES. So that's it, is it? I have a rival! I might have known!

MRS. VAUGHAN. Ah, you're angry at last!

JAMES. On the contrary; that sets my mind at rest. I had some remorse at the thought that I was leaving Helen perhaps to tedium and solitude; but now that I know there will at any rate be no solitude, whatever the tedium . . .

MRS. VAUGHAN. That's right! Abuse your rival.

JAMES. Come, we mustn't quarrel; just when I am off.

MRS. VAUGHAN. You are off?

JAMES. I shall go at once.

MRS. VAUGHAN. To-day?

JAMES. I shall start for America this afternoon if there's a boat; and there I shall stay for good.

MRS. VAUGHAN. You'll stay there? [*He nods.*] You won't come here any more? [*He shakes his head.*] Dear Mr. Thompson! The idea that I shall never see you again has created quite a revulsion of feeling in me. I positively like you now. I'm sorry you're going. You do make things so easy.

JAMES. How pretty you look in that hat!

MRS. VAUGHAN. It isn't a hat. But whatever will people say?

JAMES. I don't care. I don't subscribe to a press-cutting association.

MRS. VAUGHAN. Ah, you satirical creature!

JAMES. Well, I hope she'll be happy with Latimer. He's a noble fellow. He always reminds me of one of the characters in the Old Testament. You remember what Jacob said of Issachar? He was so brave, so good, so patient, he called him a strong ass . .

MRS. VAUGHAN. A strong ass?

JAMES. A strong ass between two burdens.

MRS. VAUGHAN. Me and Helen I suppose? You wicked man! Well, I suppose I must forgive you now. Would you like to say good-bye to Helen?

JAMES. No, no! I'll simply vanish. I'll just step back into my punt, like Lohengrin, and go. Good-bye. [*Glancing round.*] Is nobody going to come in?

[*He kisses her hand, and goes out by the French window, waving his hand, and smiling.*]

Good-bye!

MRS. VAUGHAN. Good-bye!

CURTAIN.

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